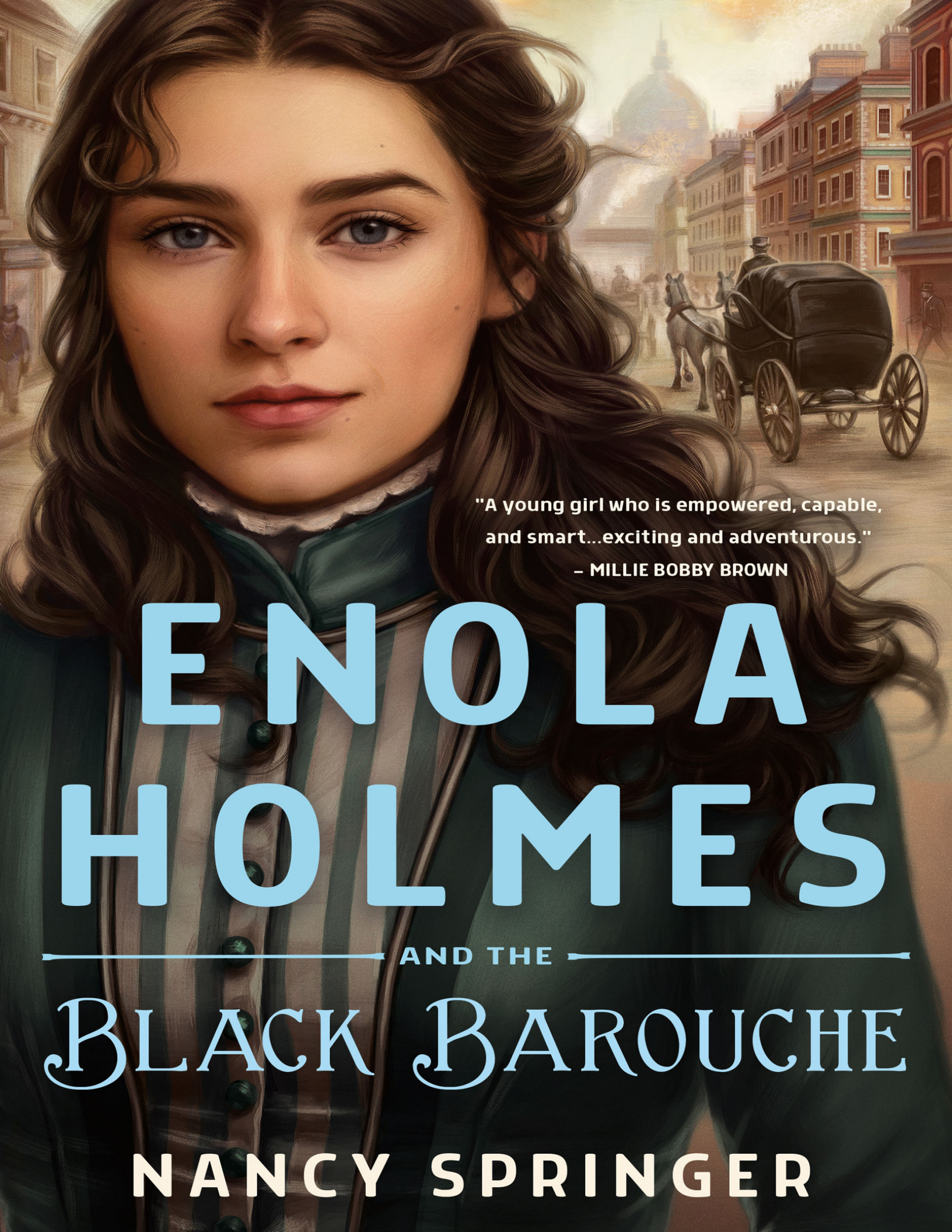
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– MILLIE BOBBY BROWN
ENOLA HOLMES
AND THE
BLACK BAROUCHE
NANCY SPRINGER

ENOLA HOLMES

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WEDNESDAY BOOKS
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Table of Contents

About the Author

Copyright Page

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For Teanna Byerts, longtime friend

Prologue

by Sherlock Holmes, 1889

Those of you who are aware of my distinguished career as the world's first Private Consulting Detective can hardly remain unaware of the sensational way in which another Holmes of similar ilk, my much younger sister, Enola, has lately burst upon the London scene. Many have found her unabashed capture of the public eye both scandalous and deplorable, and some question my own failure to control her. Therefore I welcome this opportunity to pen my own logical and dispassionate account of my dealings with Enola Eudoria Hadassah Holmes.

To absolve myself at once of any suspicions of sentimentality, let me state that I have no childhood memories of my sister, Enola; indeed, I barely knew her until July of 1888. In 1874, when she was born, I was on the point of leaving home and living on my own to pursue my studies; indeed, I hastened my departure due to the most unpleasant household disruption consequent upon her infant arrival. I encountered her over the next few years only occasionally and only with the natural revulsion of a gentleman towards a messy and undeveloped specimen of humanity. At the time of our father's funeral, she was four years old and still incapable of maintaining the cleanliness of her nose. I do not recall having any sensible discourse with her at that time.

Ten years passed before the next time I saw her, in July of 1888.

This was no normal occasion. The unexpected and unexplained disappearance of her mother—our mother—caused young Enola to summon my brother, Mycroft, and me from London. As our train pulled into our rural destination, Enola awaited us on the railway platform, resembling nothing so much as a fledgling stork. Remarkably tall for a girl of fourteen, she wore a frock that failed to cover her bony shanks, and no gloves or hat; indeed, the wind had turned her hair into a jackdaw's nest.

Mycroft and I thought her a street urchin, failing to recognize her until she spoke to us: “Mr. Holmes, and, um, Mr. Holmes?” As lacking in manners as a colt, she seemed confused by Mycroft’s questions, and indeed, by the time we arrived at Ferndell Hall, our ancestral home, I thought my sister perhaps even a bit more brainless than the typical female.

Once on the scene, Mycroft and I concluded that our mother had not been kidnapped but, suffragist that she was, had run away. This did not greatly concern us, for Mother had served her reproductive purpose and was, at her age, both useless and incorrigible. However, as something had to be done about Enola, we considered that it was perhaps not too late to salvage her. Ignoring her nonsensical protests, we made arrangements to place her in an excellent finishing school, hoping eventually to marry her off.

Mycroft and I returned to London feeling that we had done our duty.

However, our sister never arrived at the school. On the journey, she contrived to vanish.

How dare she? The ingratitude of her!

For the ensuing days, I, Sherlock Holmes, the world’s greatest detective, devoted all my skill to tracking a silly runaway girl, presumably disguised as a boy—but I could find no trace of her. Then, much to my chagrin, Inspector Lestrade of Scotland Yard gave me news of her.

She was masquerading as a widow.

A widow! For the first time I realized I had underestimated her. She had at least a modicum of brain, for, by becoming a widow, she had quite obliterated her face, added a decade or more to her age, and discouraged anyone from approaching her.

She was, however, in a widow’s weeds, noticeable. I traced her to London, scarcely able to believe she had the temerity to venture there—and at Scotland Yard I encountered an aristocratic lad who had been rescued from kidnappers by a girl in a widow’s guise! The boy informed me, however, that she was now dressed as a spinster with a pince-nez.

I redoubled my efforts to find her and save her from the perils of London. Unfortunately, I had no likeness of her with which to advertise. No photograph of her had ever been taken. But I did have a most

interesting and revealing booklet of ciphers our mother had given her. Having thus discovered that the two of them secretly communicated via *The Pall Mall Gazette* personal columns, I placed my own message pretending I was Mother and asking Enola to meet me. But somehow she saw through my ruse. Whilst I was at the British Museum waiting to pounce on her, she gained entry to my apartment and stole back the booklet! When my landlady said she appeared to be a poor huckster shivering in the autumn cold, I realized I had actually walked past her on my way out!

Even more concerned for young Enola now, fearing that she might indeed be indigent, I concentrated my search on the slums, where one freezing winter night I met the Sister of the Streets, a mute nun enveloped in a black habit who ministered to the poor. Indeed, she fed me a biscuit. Shortly thereafter, this nun delivered a swooning lady into my arms and tersely told me the identity of the villain who had harmed her. Recognizing the “mute” nun’s voice, I realized to my utmost shock that the Sister was my sister! I tried to seize her, but she fended me off with a dagger and disappeared into the night. All the police in London failed to find her. Returning, defeated, to my flat in the morning, I found her discarded habit there! The brass, the nerve, the sheer daring of her, she had hidden in my own rooms while I was out looking for her!

And, by the way, in order to rescue the lady, she had quite savaged a murderous villain with her dagger. Evidently my sister, Enola, could take care of herself, but drat the girl, she could not be allowed to grow up wild on the London streets. I simply had to rescue her. Yet despite my best efforts, winter dragged into spring with nary a sign of her.

Then my attention was all seized by the inexplicable disappearance of my dear friend Dr. Watson. For a week I neither ate nor slept, nor did my brother, Mycroft, but we could not find a sign of him. Indeed, it was not we who saved him, but our sister! A message in the newspapers led us straight to poor Watson where he was being held captive in a lunatic asylum, and the message was signed E. H.—Enola Holmes.

Quite humbled, I had no idea how she accomplished this feat.

Nor did I have any idea where in London she lived or how she sustained herself day to day. But, gentle reader, please recall the swooning lady she had once delivered into my arms. Shortly after Watson's return, that same lady fell victim to a forced-marriage scheme, and I was retained to save her. This involved a surreptitious nighttime visit to the mansion where I had reason to think she was being held captive. All dressed in black, with my face darkened, I stole into the back garden—and seemingly stepped off a precipice! Hitting the bottom of what turned out to be quite a deep trench, I badly hurt my ankle.

And my pride. One does not expect to encounter a "sunk fence" in the heart of the city, yet there I was caught in one, unable to even attempt to climb out. Already my ankle had swollen so greatly that, seated on comfortless rocks, I had to take my penknife and cut my bootlaces in order to get the boot off. Struggling to do so in utter darkness, I swore under my breath.

A girlishly distinctive voice above my head teased, "Shame on you."

I am sure my jaw dropped. So great was my shock that it quite strangled me for a moment before I was able to gasp, "Enola?"

Yes, it was she, tossing down brandy and bandages to me, then swarming up a seemingly impossible tree with a rope, of all things, between her teeth. Securing it, she came thumping down like an oversized monkey on the far side of the trench in which I remained entrapped. I expected her to give me the rope so I could get out, but no, she started to go gallivanting off by herself to free the imprisoned lady, and I might be languishing in that pit to this day if it were not that the lord of the manor came out with a shotgun and fired upon us! In the duress of the next few moments I found Enola helping me out of the trench, up and over the fence, and away, my injured foot so useless that I must needs cling to her shoulder to limp along. I am sure my brother, Mycroft, will never forgive or understand why, when we reached safety, I felt obliged to let her go, but gratitude and my sense of honour compelled me. We shook hands, my sister and I, and then like a wild moorland pony she shied away, her mane of hair flying, and ran for freedom. I was relieved to note that she wore a skirt, not trousers.

Only two days later, she entrusted me with the care of the unfortunate lady after *she* saved her from forced marriage. Thereafter, I saw no more of my sister, except that quite by accident the next month I encountered her in the home of Florence Nightingale. Enola wore glasses, a mannish hat, inky gloves, and a dark, narrow dress to disguise herself as a scholar, but to my long-awaited credit, I recognized her at once. She fled. I chased her clear up to the top of the house, but she escaped through a window, down a mighty oak tree, and away like a hare.

Simultaneously angry and admiring, I went about the business Miss Nightingale had engaged me for: finding a missing woman named Tupper. I made my inquiries, then the next night I got myself up like a poor rickety old greybeard and went scrounging around a certain grandiose house as if searching the gutters for farthings. Much amazed was I when a plainly dressed but obviously aristocratic lady crossed the road in front of me, strode up the walk, and smartly rapped the brass knocker. It was Enola! Unable to stop her before she entered that dangerous place, I made shift to watch her through the windows; indeed, such was my concern for her safety that I climbed the side of the house when she was escorted upstairs. As I clung to vines, my face pressed against the glass to see within, she looked straight at me and winked! I was so taken aback, I nearly lost my grip and fell. Thereafter, as was becoming deplorably customary, she outwitted me. As the front door burst open and I was busy engaging the villain in jujitsu, Enola disappeared out the back way along with, of course, the Tupper woman, whom she conveyed to safety at the Nightingale house.

The next day, from shouted conversation through an ear trumpet, I pieced together that the pitiful, deaf, and ancient Mrs. Tupper had been Enola’s landlady, and with some mental excitement I deduced that Enola might visit her at the Nightingale residence. Thereafter I lurked in wait for her, along with a companion named Reginald. Dozens of people entered the Nightingale home daily, and on the lookout for my plain-faced sister, I paid no attention whatsoever to quite a lovely lady in an elaborate cerulean gown of three fabrics—but Reginald, my sister’s longtime pet collie, whined and pulled at the leash! I let him go bounding to her, and could

scarcely believe it when the “lady” greeted the dog with laughter and tears, most unceremoniously sitting on the ground to hug him! When she saw me looking down at her, she smiled up into my face and willingly took my hand to arise. She sensed, I think, that I no longer “looked down” on her in any other sense of the phrase.

Thus were we reunited. Not without complications; she gave me the slip again that selfsame day. But we remained in communication, and only a few days later I contrived to get her, in her most ladylike incognito, into the same cab as our brother, Mycroft. After spending an evening with his astonishing sister, helping her locate a missing duchess in the labyrinth of London’s dockyards, Mycroft came to much the same conclusions I had already reached:

Enola did not need protection.

Enola did not need to go to finishing school.

Nor did Enola need to be married off. Indeed, heaven help any man who might be so unwary as to wed her.

The next day, Enola’s fifteenth birthday, the three of us had tea and cake together at my flat. From a letter recently received, we now knew why our mother had run away: her days were numbered, she had spent them in freedom from society’s dictates, and she was now deceased. Enola shed a few tears, but her smiles were manifold; her mother was gone, but she had her brothers now. Mycroft had made peace with her, and I had grown to care for her. All was well.

Or so I reflected to my satisfaction, quite blindly failing to foresee that she might go sticking her considerable nose into one of my cases …

Chapter the First

After my reconciliation with my brothers in the summer of 1889, I spent August quite happily with Reginald Collie, visiting Ferndell, my childhood home in the country. Moreover, after returning to London and my very safe albeit somewhat Spartan room at the Professional Women's Club, I purchased a delightful new dress, apricot foulard with slightly puffed shoulders and a narrow gored skirt, which disguised me as no one but my slender self! At last, and most fortuitously, the "hourglass figure" was going out of style—just when I no longer required bosom enhancers and hip transformers to conceal myself from Sherlock and Mycroft! Eagerly I looked forward to seeing them again as the authentic Enola Holmes.

But days became a week, then a fortnight; August became September, yet I did not hear from them.

My spirits sank. Once more I found myself too much alone, as seems to be my fate; my very name, Enola, when spelt backwards, reads "alone." I wanted to purchase a hat to go with the apricot foulard, but even contemplation of that pleasing errand failed to rouse me from inertia. So, one sunny afternoon when I could have been making the rounds of the shops, instead I was moping in the club parlour when a maid brought me a note on a brass salver. "The gentleman said he'll wait for your reply, miss."

Males, you see, gentle reader, were not allowed past the door of the Professional Women's Club.

No gentlemen ever called for me; therefore the note had to be from one of my brothers, almost certainly from Sherlock, as Mycroft could hardly ever be induced to stray from his orbit among his Pall Mall lodgings, his Whitehall government office, and the Diogenes Club. So my heart quite

leapt as I reached for the note, written upon a sheet of stationer's paper, and unfolded it to read. But first I looked at the signature.

Bother. It was just Dr. Watson. He wrote:

Dear Miss Enola,
Your brother Sherlock would deplore my applying to you in this fashion, I am sure, but both as his friend and as his medical advisor I feel compelled to notify you of his alarming condition. Perhaps you are unaware that he is prone to fits of melancholia. And undoubtedly he will castigate me for my interference. Just the same, I must beg you to come with me to see him, in hopes that your presence might influence him for the better. I await your response.

Your humble servant,
John Watson, M.D.

My heart recommenced its gymnastics. Sherlock, in an alarming condition? Whatever did Watson mean?

I must needs go see at once.

Bolting to my feet, I instructed the maid, "Tell the gentleman I will be with him directly," and ran for my room to put on my newest boots—I had been wearing delicate silk slippers fit only for indoors; they would have been shredded on the street—and find a matching, decent pair of gloves, and tidy my impossible hair before topping it with a hat, and snatch up a parasol. A fashionable lady must never be without a parasol, or a fan, or at least a handkerchief, something pretty to carry, and the gentle reader will doubtless have noticed by now that I had become fond of appearing to be a fashionable young woman of society.

So much so, indeed, that I had a fancy to change my dress, but I overruled it. Rather than leave Dr. Watson waiting on the sunny pavement any longer than was necessary, I assured myself that the taffeta-and-dotted-Swiss frock I wore was quite smart enough.

When I hurried out of the front door of the Professional Women's Club, the good doctor was waiting with a hansom cab, into which he helped me

with some conventional words of greeting before seating himself at my side and bidding the cabbie to convey us to Baker Street.

Of course I then had to make the usual inquiries: were Dr. Watson and his wife quite well? I liked Dr. Watson a great deal, and hoped he could hear my affection in the warmth of my voice. Were I not so fond of him, I would have rudely skipped these preliminaries, for I quite wanted to know more about what was wrong with my brother.

"And Sherlock? Something causes you to feel alarmed about him, Doctor?"

The good doctor sighed, his honest brown eyes troubled. "For the past ten days, Holmes has exerted his amazing powers nonstop on a case concerning secret papers purloined from the Admirality, the *Princess Alice* shipping disaster, and a rare species of Malaysian spider. Working around the clock without pause, he has strained his extraordinary constitution to its breaking point, and now that he has resolved the matter, he has plunged into the deepest depression. At the triumphal hour when our nation's leaders praise him in the halls of Parliament, he will not leave his lodgings nor eat, and it took all of my persuasive powers earlier today to get him out of bed." Dr. Watson, who had been speaking to the floor of our cab, now raised his steadfast gaze, making no attempt to conceal his distress. "I exhorted him to shave and get dressed as a rudimentary step in exerting himself towards recovery, but to no avail. He refused me without uttering a word. He turned his head away and ignored me."

The hansom halted in front of 221 Baker Street. But after we had descended and the cab rattled away, I balked on the pavement, telling Dr. Watson, "I will not go up until I understand what I am to do."

"You are unfamiliar with melancholia?"

"Not entirely." I tried to smile but grimaced instead. "I've had such dark fits myself; I suppose the predisposition runs in the family. To me, the mood seems rooted in spleen, and I think a fine fit of temper, some cleansing anger, might be its best cure. Do you agree?"

Watson seemed a bit flummoxed by my views, but replied staunchly, "Any rousing change should surely be an improvement."

“Then I think, my dear doctor, you had better go about your business. I believe I am likely to have better luck with Sherlock on my own.”

★ ★ ★

Mrs. Hudson, Sherlock’s amiable, long-suffering landlady, gave me a wink and a smile as she unlocked his door for me.

Letting myself in, I found myself stepping into melancholia made manifest in the form of gloom. Draperies closed over the windows and unlit lamps made Sherlock’s sitting room a dim and dusky Lethe through the shadows of which I could barely see him lounging on his settee—or at least I saw a long, featureless, motionless figure reclining there.

“Dear me, how very crepuscular we are,” I chided as I crossed the room to throw open the window blinds. Daylight flooded in, and I turned to have another look at my brother. Wearing a mouse-coloured dressing gown, Sherlock lay with his lower limbs stretched out on the couch and crossed at the ankles—his bare, bony ankles seemed oddly vulnerable to me, although he had carpet slippers on his feet. Beside him on the floor stood a stack of newspapers, placed there for his diversion by the faithful Watson, I felt sure. But I saw that not one had been touched. Sherlock leaned back against the settee’s pillowed arm, his long hands lying idle in his lap. He had turned his head towards me, yet hardly seemed to look at me, his gaze unfocused. With a pang in my heart, I missed his usually keen eyes. His skin looked pale, his face unshaven and haggard.

“My dear brother, whatever is the matter with you, sitting in the dark?” I said in an officious way meant to be annoying. “We have a case of the mopes and we need treatment, do we? Well, let us see to it.” Setting my gloves and parasol aside, I helped myself to a pencil and a tablet of rather expensive paper from his desk. Appropriating a dining chair, I placed it beside the settee and seated myself upon it, directly in front of him, peering into his bristly face and nodding solemnly. “If you were in the asylum, they would give you chloral hydrate and black hellebore to take the spleen out of you,” I said, “but I suppose we could start with a purge.” I began to scribble on the tablet paper in my lap, muttering as if to myself, “Laudanum, belladonna, antimony, all highly efficient if they do not cause

your untimely demise … I'm sure Dr. Watson could recommend something. Or we could try sweating the black bile away, Sherlock!" I glanced at him, not so much in search of a reaction as to show him my fanatically gleaming eyes, for my sense of melodrama had quite taken charge of me, and I am sure I quite looked the part of a fervid female determined to help at any cost to the sufferer. I returned my attention to my fiendish list, augmenting it. Sweat. Turkish bath. No, total immersion in *cold* water! "Tonic, sweat bath, ice water," I gabbled, "or—" As if the lightning of genius had struck me, I stiffened straight up in my chair. "Or one of those new galvanic baths! Have you heard, Sherlock, they place one in the water and pass electricity through—"

O joy! He interrupted! "Leave me alone or I'll galvanize *you.*"

I beamed at his stormy eyes now focused upon me. "Galvanic belts are also available for purchase, you know, at some of the more up-to-date shops. I could bring you one and you could wear it until you are feeling better."

"Get out of here and let me be, Enola!"

"Let you be like a mole in the dark eating worms? No indeed, my dear brother. It is my mission as well as my duty to take care of you."

"Your mission be damned!" He sat up straight, his hands clutching the couch, and, glory be, he raised his voice at me! "Interfering female," he shouted, "what do I need to do in order to—"

"Exactly!" I grinned at him. "Galvanization is indeed what you need to do in order to cure yourself. And along with the galvanic belt, certainly I could purchase you some mustard plasters. I have heard that, for melancholia, sometimes a counter-irritant—"

"You yourself are quite irritating enough! Would you please *leave*?"

I gentled my voice. "Not until I see you dressed and eating, my dear brother."

He turned away from me. "No."

"Sherlock—"

"No." He lapsed back onto the settee, his voice a monotone. "No. Go stick your head in the Thames, fancy hat and all. Let me alone."

"Sherlock," I complained, more coaxing than provoked.

He did not answer. Leaning over to peek at him, I saw that his eyes were closed, the better to ignore me thereby.

I sat back in my chair, sighing. Although determined not to give up, I had no idea what to do next. I had shot my bolt, and had no other arrows at hand—except, I supposed, my obstinate presence.

So I sat where I was.

Time passed as I listened to the silence, trying without success to think what next to do or say. Sherlock lay taut and still but not asleep; he scarcely seemed to breathe, and the clock ticking on his mantelpiece made more noise than he did, that and the traffic rumbling over the cobbles of Baker Street. After a while I heard the bell ring at the front door, and Mrs. Hudson's matronly footsteps as she went to answer it, but I gave the matter no thought—until, a short while later, I heard Mrs. Hudson again, this time ascending the stairs! She knocked at the door in her usual crisp fashion, let herself in, and said to the motionless form on the settee, "It's a young woman to see you, Mr. Holmes, all pale and trembling, so beside herself with some terrible trouble that she won't take no for an answer. I know what you told me, Mr. Holmes, but—"

Her voice choked to a halt as he opened his eyes and glared at her. That single dagger-sharp look answered her as clearly as words.

"But I can't just put her back out in the street," Mrs. Hudson appealed with distress I had no doubt was genuine.

I stood up and walked over to her. "Never mind, Mrs. Hudson." I took the card from her salver. "Send the young lady up directly. Tell her that Mr. Holmes's sister and associate will be happy to advise her."

Chapter the Second

Miss Letitia Glover, said the card in a most peculiar way; the name was typewritten rather than having been done in a print shop, and all around the edge of the stiff little paper rectangle ran a decorative border that reminded one of cross-stitch embroidery, XxXxXxX, most cleverly executed, like the name, with a typewriter.

I was still admiring this singular card as light footfalls pelted up the stairs and the door whooshed open to admit Holmes's client—or rather, mine. My brother had resumed impersonating an inanimate object, motionless, with his eyes closed, not even looking at Miss Glover. I, however, studied her with interest as I extended my hand to her. Perhaps never before had I seen grief and determination so intermingled on such a fair, young face—heavens, she seemed only a few years older than I was. With her eyes puffed and reddened from weeping but her chin lifted and her lips compressed, she returned my handshake firmly.

"Flossie simply cannot be gone from this world," she stated, her voice clotted yet vibrant with emotion. "At first I wept, all day long, but lying awake last night and thinking it over, I refuse any longer to believe it. My sister and I are twins. Possibly you have heard of the empathic bond twins share. I would have instantly sensed my loss had she passed away."

"Please, Miss Glover, be seated and tell me how I can help you." I beckoned her to a comfortable chair beside the window. As she crossed the room, she looked curiously at the supine figure on the settee, and I smiled. "I assure you, Miss Glover, you need pay no heed to my catatonic brother. In his present state he is harmless, and as deaf as the driftwood he resembles."

"Deaf?" She seated herself, placing her reticule on the floor beside her.

"Willfully so." I took my seat in the chair facing hers, both of us angled with our backs towards Sherlock, and of course I surveyed her from head

to toe without appearing to do so. Rather than flaunting the usual cheap baubles and imitation finery of a working girl, she wore a mannish shirt, waistcoat, and cravat above her narrow skirt—but the cravat was cheerful paisley, the waistcoat cerulean blue, and her cream-coloured shirt made of soft silk. Her simple chignon was topped by an equally simple bowler hat of navy-blue velveteen. She could have been an eccentric suffragist aristocrat if it were not for something indefinably middle class about her speech and manner. “I can see by your mode of dress, Miss Glover, that you are no ordinary young woman. You work for your living, but with the greatest independence and dignity.”

“I take great pride in my work as a typist,” she replied, and I thought: Of course! Her card! As I nodded, she attempted a smile, continuing, “As you can tell by my surname, my forebears were humble glove makers, and my family’s money earned in trade, but I share with my sister—”

The word choked her. “Your sister?” I gently prompted.

“My twin. Flossie.” The word verged upon becoming a sob until Miss Glover paused, visibly struggling to master herself. Her voice barely trembled as she went on. “I share with her a disregard for such class distinctions, and from the day of our birth, our parents saw to it that we had every advantage of education and culture. Flossie—her name is Felicity, but we call her Flossie—she took to the arts like a lark to the sky, dancing like a butterfly and singing like a nightingale. I, however, found myself more at home with mathematics. A slide rule is my best friend.” Miss Glover managed a wincing smile. “I have remained a spinster, and make my living as a typist and bookkeeper. But Felicity was born for marital bliss, or so it seemed. When our parents departed this earthly sphere, they did so happy in the knowledge that their daughter was the wife of the Earl of Dunhench, no less.

“I, too, was happy for Flossie’s good fortune, although I saw her seldom and I have missed her dreadfully in the two years since she married. I have been even lonelier since our parents passed on, but I contented myself with the thought that all was well for Flossie—or at least so I thought, until yesterday.”

“And what happened yesterday?” I prompted as Miss Glover hesitated, apparently struggling to go on.

Rather than speaking—indeed, perhaps unable to speak—Miss Glover bent, reached into her reticule, and withdrew a letter, which she passed to me.

It was addressed to Miss Letitia Glover of 19 Keswick Terrace, a modest but respectable London neighbourhood, and it had been sealed with silver wax bearing the imprint of a coat of arms. Unfolding the heavy, cream-coloured rag paper, I knew even before I read the embossed letterhead that the missive was from someone of rank.

CADOGAN BURR RUDCLIFF II, EARL OF DUNHENCH

DUNHENCH PARK HALL

THREEFINCHES

SURREY

In dark blue ink below, penned large in an unmistakably masculine hand, ran the letter:

August 31, 1889

My Dear Tish,
I’m awfully sorry to be the sender of bad tidings. Some news can only be stated starkly if at all, so I will be blunt: Flossie has passed away due to a sudden and virulent illness. Fear of the disease caused her mortal remains to be cremated rather than prepared for burial. As you are her closest blood relative, I will send her ashes to you in a parcel along with this letter. I am sure you will be deeply grieved as am I, but may memories of your sister comfort you.

Most sincerely,
Caddie

Once I had scanned this, I slowly and deliberately read it aloud, heading and all, for I wanted to know whether I had missed some nuance or if it was really as oddly offhanded as I thought.

Then I refolded it and handed it back to Miss Letitia Glover, and we stared at each other. She looked quite pale.

"I cannot and will not believe it," she said.

"It seems singularly lacking in details," I agreed. "What were the circumstances and exact time of your sister's supposed passing away? Was no doctor present, or did he not give her ailment a name? What were her last words? Did she convey no message to you? Who was with her? And 'awfully sorry'? Does that sound like a heartbroken husband? Altogether, it rings false."

She nodded her most emphatic agreement. "And why did I receive no telegram? The moment she became seriously ill, I should have been sent for."

"Quite."

"And no funeral? Instead, *cremation*?" The shock in her voice echoed in my own mind. A few radical social reformers had been advocating cremation as a more sanitary alternative to burial, but public opinion remained strongly against it, and the practice was far from common.

"Cremation of the wife of an earl seems quite odd," I concurred.

Her control of her emotions beginning to slip, Miss Glover wailed, "But why would Caddie write such things if they are not true?"

I leaned back in my chair, rested my elbows on its arms, and steepled my fingers. "Tell me all about your sister and this 'Caddie' person." More properly titled Lord Cadogan Burr Rudcliff II, Earl of Dunhench in Surrey, and how had a middle-class girl from London ever come to be married to him?

"Flossie—her extraordinary talents and beauty—" Miss Letitia Glover spoke haltingly in her distress, and in the midst of my patient attempts to coax the story out of her, Mrs. Hudson appeared with a tray of sandwiches and tea; I suspect she was curious to see whether there had been any change in Sherlock's attitude. Altogether, Miss Glover's tale became much interrupted, so for the gentle reader's sake I offer this summary:

Shortly after her sixteenth birthday, Felicity Glover had been offered a position as governess for a banker's three small children. The banker's social circle was an exalted one, and the beauty and accomplishments of his governess did not go unnoticed by guests; she was often requested to play the piano and sing for them. (At this point I must remark that my client, had her face been smiling rather than harrowed with grief, and had her costume been stylish, would have been quite a beauty in her own right. She and her twin differed in their tastes and talents but looked alike.) The lovely Felicity "Flossie" Glover soon found herself teaching social arts and deportment to the Marquess of Linderlea's children, the sons out of short pants and the daughters of an age to wear their dresses long and their hair up. Therefore, frequently they dined with family and guests, and while the governess's evening gowns could not have been nearly as rich as those of the ladies, her beauty and spirit so well lived up to her name (for Felicity was a happy soul) that she caught the eye of more than one young lord. And she was so well liked that only passing murmurs of scandal arose, despite the great disparity in rank, when she was courted by the Earl of Dunhench. At age thirty, the second Cadogan Burr Rudcliff, Lord Dunhench, a widower with two children sadly deceased, had become one of England's most sought-after bachelors, handsome, charming, titled, and wealthy. No doubt there was some wailing and gnashing of teeth in families with debutante daughters when he proposed marriage to eighteen-year-old Felicity Glover and she accepted. The wedding put a great strain on the bride's family's financial resources, which might have contributed to the untimely expiration, some months later, of the bride's parents. But the marriage, by all accounts, had been happy.

"Flossie wrote often, urging me to visit," Miss Glover concluded, "but I lacked the courage to brave Dunhench Hall. Even at my sister's wedding, primped and rigged as never before in my life, still I felt like a jackdaw among peacocks."

"But your sister's letters to you were frequent and cheerful?"

"Yes! And now, with no warning whatsoever—this." Grief and, I think, indignation choked her.

“A most peculiar way of imparting a matter of such seriousness. Miss Glover, is this letter in character for your brother-in-law? What is he like?”

“I am beginning to think that I do not truly know.”

“But what did you think before?”

“That he must be a nice enough person because I saw no vice in him. He was a smiling, courteous, good-looking man, but now I realize that all I saw was superficial. I no more know him than—than a cipher. He has kept his true self to himself; he is like *X* in an algebra problem.”

I agreed, but chose not to say what I had inferred from Cadogan Rudcliff’s handwriting: that he had a remarkably good opinion of himself (many flourishes), that he was strong-willed (broad strokes, heavy pressure), and that he preferred action to wisdom (extreme forward slant). Instead, I changed the subject. “You mentioned a parcel of ashes.”

Letitia Glover nodded as she once more reached into her reticule, pulling from it a pasteboard box from which she drew a small but very tasteful urn carved out of some pale stone—alabaster, or perhaps cream jade. This she handed to me. Lifting the stopper and squinting down the urn’s narrow neck, I could see nothing.

“Have you inspected the contents?”

Clearly horrified, Miss Glover shook her head.

“We must do so, I think.” Standing up, I moved across the room to Sherlock’s desk to spare her sensibilities. I spread out a blank sheet of white paper, and onto this, with great care, I poured a small sample from the urn.

I saw ashes, and wondered what on earth I had been expecting—perhaps a complete set of teeth? I had no experience of cremation and no idea how to tell whether these burned remains were human.

“There are white bits that might be bone chips,” I reported doubtfully.

“For the love of mercy,” said a peevish man’s voice, pleasantly startling me. The peevish man, Sherlock, got up from the settee and stalked across the room, carpet slippers flapping, to stand glowering down at me. He took a pinch of the ashes and headed towards his microscope, where he turned the gas lamp up for the brightest possible illumination, placed his sample

on a glass slide, added a drop of water and a cover slip, then perched on a tall stool looking a bit storkish with the wings of his dressing gown trailing down. Having placed the slide in its bracket, he manoeuvred it into position, then peered into the instrument. He turned a focusing knob, peered some more, then lifted his unkempt, uncombed, unshaven head, speaking not to me, but to Miss Letitia Glover.

"Unless your sister was brown and furry," he said, "these are not her ashes."

Chapter the Third

Miss Letitia Glover sat speechless and visibly struggling against tears, whether more of relief or of consternation I could not tell.

Sherlock strode past her, opened the front door, bellowed, “Mrs. Hudson, hot water!” then without another word disappeared into his bedroom.

I applied myself to comforting Miss Glover, pulling my chair closer to hers, passing her a dainty handkerchief scented with lavender, and attempting to say something kind while succeeding only in being blunt and awkward. “You are caught in such a muddle, you must feel as if your head might explode.”

Handkerchief to her face, Miss Glover nodded fervidly.

“Let us make a list, shall we, and see whether we can sort your problem out at all.” Turning to a fresh page of tablet paper, and reading each line aloud as I penciled it, I wrote:

- Ashes are probably those of a large dog. Can we therefore assume Flossie is alive?
- If so, why did Cadogan Rudcliff attempt to deceive his sister-in-law?
- How many other people has he deceived, and again, why?
- If he is involved in some plot involving his wife’s disappearance, what is its object?
- How did his first wife meet her demise?
- Where is Flossie and what has happened to her, if she still lives?

- How can we find out?

I stared at that final question for some time.

Miss Glover surprised me by speaking up calmly. “I should write to Caddie—all too appropriate a nickname, as it begins to appear he truly is a cad.”

“But you will not yet betray that sentiment to him.”

“No, I will address him as ‘Dearest Caddie,’ and sign my name ‘Tish,’ and ask questions about my sister’s supposed demise, requesting details.”

“Excellent.” My brother’s voice turned our heads. Exiting his bedroom, he walked towards us, impeccably washed, shaven, combed, and dressed in a tweed suit for traveling. Standing over us, he bowed slightly to read the list in my lap, then nodded in cool approval. “How to find out is indeed the salient problem,” he said with no worse than his usual condescension, “as I must do so without exciting suspicion.”

“We,” I corrected him. If he thought he was going to take over this case just because it had gotten him up off the settee, he was sorely mistaken. “I take it you are going to Surrey? I intend to start in Belvidere.”

I am sure I puzzled him, for he turned to me with eyebrows raised, but before I could explain, Miss Glover spoke up in the manner of a shy person facing an unpleasant matter. “Mr. Holmes, your fee—”

He turned to her and made his most gracious bow. “I shall accept none, as I greeted you, or rather, failed to greet you, in so unmannerly a fashion when you came in. Your problem has features of interest, Miss Glover, and I will give it my fullest attention. Have you a photograph of your sister?”

Apparently she did, for she bent to reach into her reticule. This interlude gave me opportunity to rise, retrieve my gloves, and make for the door. “Sherlock,” I called back over my shoulder, “you may contact me through my club, and I will contact you through Mrs. Hudson. Au revoir!” Quitting the premises before he could argue, I ran down the stairs in high spirits.

★ ★ ★

A few hours later, looking quite the lady in a teal blue traveling outfit complete with tastefully matching hat, I exited the Belvidere train station and headed towards Basilwether Park at a brisk walk, breathing deeply in appreciation of air invisible to the eye, unlike that of London. Within moments I reached the long drive that led to Basilwether Hall, where I promenaded beneath a leafy archway of old lime trees, greatly enjoying their green-scented shade and my bucolic, sootless surroundings—

Half in a dream, I heard the soft thud of hooves on grass, yet noticed the sound only in afterthought, so to speak, when an elegant horse and rider cantered out from between the tree trunks directly in front of me. My presence caused the horse to shy violently, as horses will when they discover something unexpected beneath their long noses. The rider, to his credit, kept his seat and brought his mount to a swerving halt, facing me. His spotless jodhpurs and boots, cutaway jacket and silk topper almost disguised him as a tall, grown man, but not quite. He had shot up but not yet filled out since the last time I had seen him, a year before; I saw him to be all hands and elbows and sandy hair unruly beneath his hat.

Rather hotly, as was understandable, he challenged me, “Miss, what are you doing here, on private land?”

“Why, hello to you, too, Tewky.” And rather than giving him a maidenly simper, I grinned at him.

His jaw dropped, he leapt off of his horse, strode to me and shook my hand most warmly, all before he managed to speak. “You!” he gasped.

“Enola Holmes, at your service, Viscount Tewkesbury, Marquess of Basilwether.”

“So at last I get to know your name!”

“Indeed, Tewky.” I had concealed it previously only to evade my brothers. On the same day that I had run away from home, coincidentally Tewky had done the same and we had met most misfortunately, both of us bound hand and foot, captured for ransom by cutthroats.

“Don’t call me Tewky!” But he laughed out loud as he said it. “Still rocking the boat, aren’t you!” In my efforts to use my corset stays to cut the twine binding my wrists, I had quite literally rocked the boat in which

we had been held prisoner. “And I can see that you are still masquerading as a grown-up.”

“As are you. Why are you not off at some exclusive boarding school?”

“I told my parents I would run away from any boarding school, so I have tutors.” He gave a whimsical smile. “They let me do much as I please, so long as I promise not to run away again. And you? Still gadding about with a small fortune taking the place of a bosom?”

He actually made me blush. “Lord Tewkesbury!” I protested.

“Please don’t mind. I am far too delighted to be proper. I never imagined I would ever see you again!” Looping one arm through his horse’s reins in order to lead it, he offered me the other arm like a gentleman. “What are you doing here, Enola?”

The way I took his arm was ladylike, but the way I answered was too candid for anyone’s usual lady. “I came in search of illuminating gossip.” I imagined my brother Sherlock was doing exactly the same by loitering in some Surrey pub, most likely impersonating a working man, with a beard on his face and a cap pulled down over his eyes, perhaps managing to steer the conversation towards skeletons in the closet of the Earl of Dunhench. Here at Basilwether Park, with my hand on Tewky’s arm, I was pursuing the same end in a different way. My previous acquaintance with Viscount Tewkesbury, Marquess of Basilwether, and the camaraderie we had shared for a few days on the run after joining forces to escape the cutthroats, gave me an entrée into aristocratic gossip rather than that of gardeners and servants. It would be interesting to see which might prove more useful.

“Gossip!” Tewky exclaimed as we walked. “About whom?”

“Ah, that is exactly the problem. I must neither divulge that information nor let you guess it. Indeed, I must beg you to keep my nefarious purpose a secret.”

“Grand and dandy!” Still boyish despite the fact that he was now taller than I, he laughed again. “Enola, you are a brick.” And then, as we rounded a curve in the drive and Basilwether Hall came into view, he asked, “How long can you stay?”

“That depends.”

“On gossip? Wouldn’t you rather go horseback riding with me?”

★ ★ ★

I would far, far rather have gone horseback riding. But honour forbade. I was, first and foremost, a professional Perditorian. Just as my brother Sherlock bore the distinction of being the world's first Private Consulting Detective, I titled myself the world's first Scientific Perditorian—a finder of that which was lost. Having a client who was relying on me to find her sister—alive, it was to be hoped—I turned my back on the seductive outdoors, mounted Basilwether Hall's broad marble steps, advanced between Grecian pillars, and plied the heavy ram's-head knocker on the massive front door. The butler who responded, expressionless as all of them were, nevertheless managed to look askance at my lack of a carriage or an accompanying footman. Showing me into a front parlour to wait, taking my card upon his silver tray, and disappearing with it into the depths of the mansion, surely he expected his mistress to be "not at home." But I had written on the card a single enigmatic sentence: "We have met before." Surely the duchess's curiosity would prevail. And yes, the butler returned to show me in, revealing a certain inscrutable degree of astonishment.

The duchess awaited me in a conservatory/boudoir, its bay windows filled with potted plants, its furnishings luxurious, almost Persian. At first seated with dignity on a divan, the duchess gasped when she saw me and arose, hurrying towards me with open arms.

"Your Grace!" I exclaimed in protest, startled into an actual curtsy, which turned out to be an awkward manoeuvre in my modish skirt, narrow as was now the fashion. Her Grace, Tewkesbury's mother, wore a flounced and gathered gown that artfully flouted fashion, as was the prerogative of a duchess. All of its colours and textures—pale blue moiré taffeta, blue-grey surah, lavender voile—conspired to compliment the smooth silver-white wings of her hair above her fair and surprisingly youthful face. I would not have recognized her as the woman I had glimpsed last year, a wild-haired woman running half mad, her face harrowed by tears of terror for her "kidnapped" son.

"I did not think you would remember me!" I blurted.

“Not very clearly,” she agreed cheerfully, sweeping me into her elegant arms, “but I know who you are, and what you have done for Tewky and me, and I could not be more delighted to meet you.” She released me from a surprisingly strong hug. “Please, sit down and tell me all about yourself.”

And so I did, over tea with marmalade tarts for the next couple of hours. But—gentle reader, please forgive me—a great deal of what I told her were fibs and fictions. I affirmed that I was the younger sister of the great Sherlock Holmes, the world’s first and only Private Consulting Detective—but, as Sherlock had never made public his birthplace and almost certainly never would, there was no risk in my telling her we came from Surrey. And I exalted our family onto the fringes of the peerage, titling our father as a knight, Sir Lucretius Adolphus Holmes, while my mother’s cousin was a baronet. I said I had gone to a boarding school, naming one so prestigious it served as a portal into high society. One of the alumnae … if only I could remember names … she had married an earl …

“The Earl of Dunhench, dear?”

Yes, I quite believed that was correct!

“Caddie Rudcliff. I’ve known him since he was in short pants, my dear Enola, and I must say he sowed his wild oats with the best of them, and there was a bit of a shadow over the marriage. The girl was Myzella Haskell of the St. John’s Haskells.”

Ah. I was to learn about one of Caddie’s earlier wives, not Flossie.

“Very respectable people, the Haskells, but quite scandalized, as were Caddie’s relations. I did not attend the wedding, for it was private.”

I blushed in genuine shock as I began to understand.

“But I heard she was quite lovely,” added Her Grace charitably, “and of course a man of such rank needn’t marry every girl he gets in trouble, so perhaps it was all right. She gave him two darling children, a girl and a boy, but most unfortunately they both expired, of diphtheria you know, and not long afterwards, she, also, passed away.”

I expressed consternation, noted that the loss of children to diphtheria is sad but commonplace—often it has been known to take a family’s entire

brood—then inquired as to the cause of Myzella's demise.

"I don't know, dear, and I can't at all understand why or how it should have been a scandal, but it was treated like one. There was no funeral. She was cremated, can you imagine?"

Chapter the Fourth

Late that night—of course I had been invited to stay for dinner, for the night, for as long as I liked—quite late, after everyone was asleep, I sallied forth from my appointed bedroom barefoot, in a borrowed nightgown grand enough for a princess, carrying a candle for light. Not much noisier than a stork, the bird of prey I most resembled, I stalked along a hallway with floorboards polished to such a shine that they reflected the glow of my candle flame, then down the lushly carpeted main stairway, and thus into the duchess's library, not to be confused with the duke's library on the opposite side of the hall. The duke, by the way, despite being a duke, had been quite pleasant to me at dinner. These were very posh people, to have more than one library. I wondered whether the duke's was finer than his wife's, and almost went to see, but managed to restrain myself, exhorting myself to attend to the business of being a Perditorian.

Lighting a gas lamp with a match from the cut-glass holder standing by, I opened the duchess's rosewood rolltop desk and readily found her address book, a dainty volume covered in figured dimity and edged with scalloped lace. The duchess, I saw with approval, had kept it up to date, its alphabetized pages quite thick with tiny, formal handwriting almost as neat as engraving. Sitting at the desk to consult it, I started doing what would not have been polite while conversing with Her Grace: I took notes.

The address book provided me with full names, correctly spelt: Cadogan Burr Rudcliff number two in Roman numerals. Myzella Odilon Rudcliff née Haskell. Felicity Fay Rudcliff née Glover.

Then I started delving. Quite wanting to find out what, exactly, had happened to Myzella in case it might enlighten me concerning Flossie's whereabouts, I wrote down names and addresses of all Haskells, taking special note of those who lived in and near St. John's, very likely

Myzella's relatives, perhaps even her siblings. That finished, I went on to do the same regarding the Rudcliffs of Dunhench—

The library door opened.

I had not prepared an excuse for my being there, had not planned an escape route or a hiding place, had not even been listening for approaching footsteps, and I felt inexcusably stupid. The only intelligent thing I could do by way of compensation was to carry on as if I had every right to be copying names and addresses out of the duchess's private records in the middle of the night. Therefore I managed—just barely—to keep myself from clutching my papers or jumping and squeaking like a frightened schoolgirl. I schooled my face into a merely inquiring expression before I looked up to see who had come in.

In a nightgown far plainer than mine, with his sandy-coloured hair wildly out of control, carrying a candle of his own, the duke's son, heir, and only living scion stood over me.

Although not exactly glad to see him under the circumstances, still, I smiled. "Tewky!"

"Don't call me that! What an absurd nightgown. You look like a giraffe in ruffles."

"I quite agree, but it's what your mother loaned me."

"Couldn't you sleep in it? What are you doing out of bed?"

"I might ask you the same question."

"I came downstairs to stave off starvation by pilfering from the larder, and then I saw your light leaking under the library door. What are *you* pilfering?" He stepped closer, squinting at my notes, and to keep myself from guiltily hiding them from him, I put my hands in my lap.

"Myzella Rudcliff? I've heard that name," he remarked. "The old ladies talk about her … Isn't she the one who married Dunhench?" He would make as eager a gossip as his mother someday. "She was his first wife. She's supposed to have died…"

How blunt, how brave, how modern of him to speak that forbidden word!

"… but there wasn't any proper funeral—"

"What do you mean?"

“She wasn’t buried. The body was burned up or something. But the wagging tongues say really she didn’t die; she got taken away in a black barouche.”

“What does *that* mean?”

“Um, I don’t know.” He looked sheepish. “I thought you would.”

“I do not know, but I quite plan to find out.” Putting the address book away and folding my papers, I stood up. Speaking mostly to myself, I murmured, “I will need a pseudonym.”

“Ermintrude,” said Tewky promptly.

He spoke with such decision that, startled, I laughed out loud. “Whatever for?”

“Because you look like an Ermintrude. I haven’t any cousins. You can be my cousin, Ermintrude Basilwether. It rolls nicely off the tongue, do you not think so?”

I thought it was a mouthful. “Preposterous,” I said, then regretfully declined to join him in raiding the larder; I went back to bed.

★ ★ ★

Even though I could trust Tewky to keep my dubious nocturnal activities a secret, still, I left the next morning, bidding the duchess a gracious adieu and tendering my regrets while telling her that I had urgent business elsewhere. I hurried to Belvidere Station and boarded a train.

I was going to Surrey. But as London lay directly along the way, I stopped there, first at my club to change into fresh clothing—quite a nice day dress in oak-green velveteen with a grass-green faille overskirt gathered up into scallops. A hat trimmed with wired loops of green ribbon matched nicely. I packed a few things into a carpetbag, then inquired at the front desk whether there had been any communication from Sherlock, which there had not.

My second stop was at 221 Baker Street to ask Mrs. Hudson whether she had heard anything from him. She had not. But whilst riding on the train from Belvidere I had composed a letter to him, which I left for her to give him in case he returned anytime soon. It read:

Dearest Inquisitive Brother,
Interestingly, it would seem that the first Dunhench wife, née Myzella Haskell, came to the same fate as the second one: cremation. However, it is rumoured that she did not actually die, but was sent away in a black barouche, whatever that implies. As it sounds rather sinister, I wonder whether the same happened to the second wife, Letitia Glover's sister? I intend to scrutinize death certificates for both unfortunate wives. Therefore I will be a genealogical researcher named Ermintrude Basilwether lodging at Threefinches or nearby, should you care to look me up.

Your Loving Sister

I neither signed my name nor addressed Sherlock by his. One must at least attempt to be discreet lest our correspondence stray into hands other than those of Mrs. Hudson. Having left this missive with her, I took the underground—its Baker Street station so convenient to my brother's residence! Yet, to my knowledge, he never used it. This subterranean transport whisked me to Victoria Station, where I caught the next train to Dorking, Surrey.

My journey was uneventful, and I arrived at Dorking—a market town rather smaller than I expected—in time for a late luncheon at none too fancy an eatery. After a bowl of beef stew and one of bread pudding—such was the available fare—I walked back to the station to rent a bicycle, but I was told, with raised eyebrows, that no such newfangled self-propelled transportation was to be had, and I was directed to the livery stables next door.

There, a tobacco-chewing personage with alarmingly protuberant side whiskers informed me that, while gigs, buggies, and broughams were available in plenty, no drivers were available at the moment. "'Ow in the world do yer come to be traveling by yerself, miss?" he added, not inquiring so much as disapproving.

"Upon my own two feet," I replied, rather more tartly than I should have.

"Be yer one of them suffragists?"

“Like my mother before me.”

“Well, yer should ’ave a man wid you just the same for ter ’andle ’orses and such.”

“I can handle a horse,” I snapped. “I will drive myself.” My own irritation had convinced me that this was so. After all, had I not once successfully driven a hansom cab through London traffic? And had I not read *Black Beauty* innumerable times as a child?

“No, miss, ye don’t hunnerstand,” said Side Whiskers in an exceedingly patronizing tone. “The driver is ter bring the ’orse an’ rig back ’ere to the stable after yer gets to—where did yer say yer were going?”

“Threefinches. How far away is that?” I inquired, thinking I might walk.

“A good ten-twelve miles.”

So much for walking. “Surely I will find an inn there, with stabling for the horse?” It was a pity, I thought, that horses, unlike bicycles, could not simply be leaned against a tree until needed.

Once more I saw eyebrows elevate. “’At’s true, miss, but to pay me by the day, an’ stablin’ on top of that—”

I produced substantial money, thus squelching protest, and the upshot was that I soon found myself and my minimal luggage in, or rather on top of, something called a “gig,” with the reins of a horse in my kid-gloved hands. The gig stood so high on two enormous wheels that I looked down on the horse, which I supposed was preferable to viewing its posterior. It was a horse of a different colour—taupe, with a yellowish cast. “What’s his name?” I asked Side Whiskers, who stood holding the bridle.

The man turned away, and not for the first time I sensed that he was hiding mirth, although for what reason I could not imagine. “’Ee’s a mare,” he said, “and ’er name is Jezzie, ain’t that right, Jezzie?” He gave her bridle what seemed to be an admonishing sort of shake.

Then he let go of it, and we were off. Jezzie—or did the man perhaps mean Jessie; had I misunderstood? Jessie or Jezzie took matters into her own hands, or perhaps I should say onto her own hooves, stepping out immediately at a brisk trot even though I tightened the reins. Luckily we were headed in the proper direction, and almost before I knew it we were

out of Dorking, speeding down a country road like a—like a whirligig, of course. The gig's high wheels whizzed over the rutted road, their motion and the height of my perch making me feel quite dizzy.

I hauled harder on the reins, trying to slow down the yellow mare, but her only response was to arch her neck—quite prettily, I admit—and clip-clop more smartly, lifting her feet like a Hackney. Folk working in their cottage gardens gaped as we flashed past. I am sure that Jezzie and the gig and I made quite a picturesque sight in that bucolic setting of golden fields and green hedges, but I failed to appreciate the artistic effect, not with my hat coming loose, its wide brim lifted by the wind, and with the horse foaming at the mouth so that bits of spume flew into my face like white butterflies of ill omen. Jezzie showed every sign of wanting to break into a gallop, and if she did, she would surely land us in a ditch. Even as she trotted, the tall gig swayed whilst going uphill, swooped its way downhill, and wildly slewed every time we rounded a curve. I admit that my innards quite sloshed with fear, nay, panic, and I heartily wished I had never said I knew how to drive a horse. What was the use of my holding the reins if Jezzie thumbed her nose at them?

Again, an impossible metaphor. But such scholarly thoughts did no good; one must take action. I hauled on the reins to my utmost, and then, in desperation, I alternated them, left-right-left-right, in a kind of seesaw attempt to get Jezzie's attention.

Thus I managed to hold the willful yellow beast to her rampaging trot. But then, as we rounded yet another terrifying curve, to my hazy gaze appeared a village ahead—Threefinches, already? It had to be. Somehow I simply *had* to get Jezzie to slow down—

No, worse! I had to get the diabolical horse to *stop*, so that I could get off! Otherwise she would carry me on and on and on, to Currywort and Harechase and heaven only knew where.

Confound the horse, whose full name, I suddenly realized, had to be Jezebel! I was not to be made a fool of by a runaway mare! My worries flipped into wrath so suddenly that without conscious thought I stood up in order to prepare for a showdown. I threw my parasol and carpetbag over the side of the gig, and then, just as it reached the edge of Threefinches, I

sawed at the reins with all my strength, wanting only to slow the accursed Jezebel sufficiently so that I could join my belongings. That failing, I grasped the reins with one hand, yanked them to my utmost, and with the other hand I seized the whip and hit Jezzie's impudent backside with it.

The result was gratifying, in a way. The mare bucked, kicked, and reared, interrupting her forward momentum enough for me to jump out of the gig, which, rearing along with her, would have made a projectile of me in any case. Lest I be injured by too much upward momentum, I dove for the grassy roadside.

Landing flat with a *whumph* and with my face in the grass, I rolled over just in time to lift my head, now hatless, and watch Jezebel paw the ground, reverse direction, and leap into her long-desired gallop, whirling the empty gig back towards Dorking and, presumably, her stable.

Chapter the Fifth

I laid my head sideways on the ground, just for a moment, to rest. At the same time I heard tramping feet approaching me from behind, accompanied by a babble of masculine voices.

"Sent the lydy flyin', it did."

"Could've broke 'er neck."

"Didjer see that yeller horse go?"

"That weren't no 'orse, that were a yeller greyhound."

"Is the lydy dead?"

"Is she fainted?"

Indignant, I wanted to sit up and say I was not so easily killed and I never fainted, but to my surprise my body would not obey me. I merely stirred and murmured.

"She's moving."

I saw the clodhopper boots of common men surrounding me and smelled alcohol on the breath of those leaning over me.

"Let's get 'er inside."

"Somebody go fer the doctor."

Strong hands, not ungentle, seized me by the feet and shoulders. I could have kicked and yelled—I felt strong enough now—but my mind had started to function, realizing that I was about to be carried into a pub, for only in a public house, or pub, would workmen be drinking in the daytime. And normally no woman of good repute would enter a pub, or if she did, she would be jeered at until she retreated. But, my avid brain realized, fate in the form of Jezebel had given me opportunity to spend some time inside a pub—no, in *the* pub, most likely the only pub in Threefinches!

So I closed my eyes and pretended to be rather more helpless than I was as the men hauled me inside and laid me down on a high-backed bench by the hearth. Someone brought something pungent in lieu of smelling salts,

but I shook my head, pushed the malodourous hand away, opened my eyes, and sat up, acting as if it were a great effort for me to do so. A burly, bearded man in an apron, undoubtedly the publican who kept the place, came running with a pillow for my back, and I thanked him with a gracious smile.

"Will ye have a nip of brandy, lydy?"

"No, thank you. Water, please."

"Jack! Water for the lydy!" he bellowed to some underling, and he remained nearby as I managed, with hands that genuinely trembled, to remove my gloves. Their thin kidskin leather was ruined by the mauling it had taken from Jezebel's reins, and my hands were red and sore; doubtless they would bruise. Grateful for the cool glass, I held it in both hands and sipped, looking around me. Half of the denizens of the place, like the owner, stood in a semicircle staring at me not unpleasantly, while the rest did the same from seats at the rustic tables—all but one. A tall man with beard stubble on his chin and quite a shock of coarse brownish-grey hair hiding his forehead had withdrawn to a table by the wall, where he devoted his attention to his mug of ale, or stout, or whatever noxious brew he might fancy.

I said brightly to the tavern-keeper, "I believe I would like to stand up."

"Now, why not wait for the doctor, lydy—"

But taking hold of his arm, as he stood within my reach, I got to my feet with reasonable steadiness. There were muted cheers from the onlookers. Nodding and simpering at the men all around me, I lilted, "Thank you so much. Do you suppose anyone could go out and fetch my bag, and my hat and parasol? I believe they fell along the—"

Already half a dozen would-be heroes were stampeding towards the door. Yet, if I had walked in here under my own power, any request for help would have been met with deepest suspicion. Such is life: odd.

Trying not to smile too widely, not to show my amusement, I proposed to the publican, still holding his arm, "I should like to try a little walk around the room."

"If'n yer sure yer not hurt, lydy."

“I feel quite restored by your hospitality.” With mincing steps I led him forward, leaning on his arm slightly from time to time to make him feel needed. Halfway around the room I reached the vicinity of the tall, scruffy workingman (to judge by his coarse and common clothing) who was hiding his face under his forelock. Beside the table at which he was seated, I paused and said to the publican as if I had just that moment thought of it, “I suppose I am going to need a ride to the inn. There is an inn?”

“Ye mean yer traveling by *yerself,* miss?” Suddenly I was no longer a “lydy,” and my doughty escort’s eyebrows shot up all too much like those of Side Whiskers.

Just barely managing to retain sweetness of tone, I asked, “Why, what did you think I was doing?”

“I thought yer were having a spin, and ye got spun.” At least this man had a sense of humour. “Ye can’t be thinking of staying overnight at a public lodging place all by yerself—”

I interrupted somewhat less sweetly. “Why, where should I stay, then, in a haystack? Surely you can recommend a reputable inn where I shall be quite safe.”

“There ain’t but the one hereabouts to serve all comers!”

I am sure he would have expostulated further, but just then a herd of men thundered into the pub with my hat, my carpetbag, my parasol, and a youth who cried, “The doctor can’t come! He’s having a baby!”

Laughter and general hubbub ensued, distracting the attention of my escort, the publican. I took the opportunity to swing my foot at the morose-looking, none-too-clean man seated at the table beside me. Naturally, he looked up. Not at all naturally for one who has just been kicked in the shin, his grey eyes twinkled. Slowly he pushed away from his table and got to his clodhopper-clad feet.

“It ain’t but a middling walk,” he said in a thick country accent, as if he had pebbles in his mouth. “Ain’t no trouble fer me to show yer the way, missus. I’ll carry yer bag.”

★ ★ ★

We waited until we got well away from the pub before either of us spoke. Then, in his normal, aristocratic tone Sherlock said, “Well done, Enola, and remarkably well planned that you should drop in at the public house that way.”

I sighed, admitting, “It wasn’t planned.”

“Surely it is not mere coincidence that you are wearing a green frock upon which grass stains do not show?”

I looked down at my faille overskirt, its delicate fabric shredded, and grimaced.

My brother added, “Your hat, also, looks a bit the worse for wear.”

Its wired ribbons had been badly smashed, but I had restored them as best I could before putting the hat back on my head, and I considered that there was no further need for Sherlock to chaff me. “I’ve been made a fool of. Enough. Have you found out anything whilst lingering at the pub? Keep your voice low,” I added, because as we progressed into the village proper we were walking directly in front of cheek-to-jowl cottages, their gable windows frowning out from under remarkably low wraparound roofs so that they resembled washerwomen in headscarves.

“I have found out principally that Rudcliff has the reputation of being quite a womanizer.” Sherlock did indeed keep his voice low. “Very few women, however, die and are cremated because their husbands are unfaithful. Did you come here merely to accost me?”

“No. I have made my own inquiries. It is rumoured that the first Lady Rudcliff, supposedly deceased, was actually, and I quote, ‘taken away in a black barouche.’”

Sherlock gave a low whistle, and although I could not see his eyebrows under his rustic forelock, I dare say they were lifted like wings.

“End quote,” I said rather testily. “What, pray tell, does the phrase ‘black barouche’ imply?” Quite evidently he knew.

“It would be premature for me to say without further evidence, especially as Rudcliff remarried.”

“Some men like to get married, Sherlock.”

He gave me a “pshaw” look. “Had he any children by the first wife?”

“Two, but neither lived.”

“Then he must desire an heir. So why would he dispose of his first wife, let alone his second?” Sherlock kept his voice down to a murmur, but his tone was knife-sharp. “It is quite preposterous.”

“*What* is quite preposterous?”

But not another word would he say.

Chapter the Sixth

The inn was of course called The Three Finches, as could be seen by three none-too-artistic wooden cutouts of birds above the front door on a half-timbered wall of such antiquity that the hostel might have been there since the times of the Tudors. The stones of the front steps were partly worn away by the feet of countless travelers.

Snatching off his cap to reveal his shaggy wig, Sherlock carried my carpetbag up those steps and into the front hallway of the inn for me, set it down there, then humbly bowed his head and tugged his forelock. Into his other, awaiting hand I deposited a few coins. “Thank you, my good man,” I told him blandly, adding, seemingly as an afterthought, “What might your name be?”

“Tom Dubbs, miss.” Bobbing, he spoke once more as if he had a mouth full of marbles.

“Tom Dubbs. And where do you lodge?”

“In the stables behind the pub, miss.”

“Very well, if I have need of you, I will send for you. My name, by the way, is The Honourable Miss Ermintrude Basilwether.” Dismissing him with a nod and a secret smile as I glanced around The Three Finches, I heard him shut the door as he let himself out.

The Three Finches showed every sign of offering rather countrified accommodations, right down to crockery dogs guarding each end of the mantelpiece. Before me rose a steep and narrow stairway. To one side of me a billiard room was visible through an open door, and to the other side a dining room with a single large table adorned by a red-checked cloth. Judging from the clatter and chatter I heard coming from the regions behind it, the people running the inn were busy in the kitchen.

A hand bell stood on the hallway table. I picked it up and rang it until the aproned innkeeper arrived. He could have looked fat and jolly as an

innkeeper should if it were not that he was scowling. Perhaps I had rung the bell too hard.

As he did not greet me, I greeted him. “Hallo, my good man. Have you a room available for me?”

Although to me my request seemed quite plain and simple, the innkeeper walked up to me and stared, his scowl deepening into a frown, as if he found it incomprehensible.

So I tried again, with no change in my airy tone, which was unwise. I should have spoken meekly and evinced a tempting amount of cash. Instead, I said breezily, “I would like to rent a room. Perhaps for several days.”

The man’s mouth, which resembled a mail slot with jowls, moved several times before he spoke. “Where’s yer ’usband?”

“No husband. Just me.”

“Wot habout yer maid, yer governess, sumphin’ like that?”

Beginning to comprehend his hesitation, I became testy. “Or my mother, I suppose? No. There are just three of us. Me, myself, and I.”

He shook his head and turned back towards the kitchen, but I seized him by his shirt sleeve. “Are there no rooms available in this inn?”

“Not fer no single female travelin’ alone. I can’t be ’eld responshible fer what might ’appen.”

Confound everything, I should have expected and prepared myself for this sort of attitude from an ox of a country innkeeper; I should have planned to coax, soothe, and bribe, but instead I had let my temper run away with me rather as Jezzie had done. “Do your rooms not have locks on the doors?” I quite wanted to produce my dagger and flourish it in front of the stubborn man’s face to show him that I was capable of defending myself, but I knew I would be misunderstood. Instead, I sharpened my aristocratic tone. “Do you not understand who I am? You are speaking with The Honourable Ermintrude Basilwether, niece of—have you never heard of the Duke and Duchess of Basilwether?”

“Huh. Hif that’s true, then stay wit some of yer hoighty-toighty friends.”

“Very well, I will!” With no idea whether I was brilliantly seizing an opportunity or making myself even more of a fool than already was apparent, I demanded, “If you refuse to provide hospitality, the least you can do is provide transportation. Find someone to drive me to Dunhench Hall.”

★ ★ ★

Glad to be rid of me, I suppose, the innkeeper supplied an ancient victoria with a similarly venerable horse and driver. Seated inside, I had no opportunity to talk with the latter, so I passed the time by looking about me. Surrey offered vistas of soft hills like billows on a sunny green ocean studded with cozy white boats—cottages, I mean, each with its flower garden and rose beds and milk cow, between which meandered peaceful waterways decked with lily pads. This was a verdant, comfortable corner of England where no dangers should lurk.

Or so I thought until I saw Dunhench Hall.

The moment I caught sight of its tall black chimneys and grey stone gables looming amidst copper beeches, I thought it looked more as if it belonged amidst windy heaths, crags, and tors than here. When my driver turned in at the drive, I saw heavy wrought-iron gates supported by massive stone pillars of great age, blotched by lichens and topped by carved stone effigies appearing to be the heads of deer, although their antlers had broken off like the limbs of some of the gnarled trees that lined the drive.

The central part of the manse, when it came into view, seemed also to be of great age, except that modern windows had been installed in its thick, ivy-draped stone walls. I could see also that the wings to each side had been added more recently, along with a pillared portico above the old oak doors.

All the windows stood blank, with their draperies drawn, and on each of the double front doors hung a yew wreath ribboned in black.

At a sedate trot my victoria rounded the circular drive leading under the portico. I rather expected to see a fountain beautifying the grass plot at the hub of the circle, but instead, there on a pedestal stood a life-size statue of

melodramatic manly pulchritude I took to be the romantic poet and expatriate Lord Byron. An interesting choice of subject—but I had no time to consider its implications. My rickety victoria halted; carrying my own carpetbag, I got out; my driver pulled away at once; and there in front of Dunhench Hall I stood with no one to greet me, which was perhaps a good thing, as I had no idea how to explain my presence. Had I foreseen coming here, I should have worn mourning. Even the statue of the poet, I noted with muted surprise and amusement, wore a black armband. And the bell was hung. A real brass bell suspended to one side of the double doors, it had crape streamers trailing from the clapper, which had been wrapped to muffle it so that it could not be rung.

Ascending a few shallow steps of black granite, I observed that the funereal wreaths on the doors covered their knockers. This stately residence was in mourning with a vengeance, meaning that the grieving family was not to be disturbed by anyone ringing the bell or knocking on the door. I surmised that those who had business here were to let themselves in.

I tried one of the doorknobs, and it yielded to my hand.

Well, nothing good could come of my standing out here. And to explain my presence, the most plausible way might be with portions of the truth.

Opening the door, I slipped inside, then quite naturally stopped to gaze upward, where high mullion windows remained undraped, letting in light enough so that I could see a tall peaked roof with timbers running across it. This was indeed a hoary old hall, a fitting place for Beowulf to have feasted in. On all sides the walls showed the dull glint of antique armaments—broadswords, battle-axes, pikes, cutlasses, samurai swords, and wicked-looking Moorish scimitars. Above the weaponry hung a close-ranked array of ancestral portraits dignified by swags of black crape. The most ancient ones were too small and dark to see clearly, but above a huge fireplace (its mantel draped in black) hung a large, modern oil-painted portrait of a handsome man—seemingly Lord Byron again? Softly, I walked closer to inspect the painting, peering at it, doubting that Byron had ever worn any military uniform, let alone such a vision of gold braid and epaulettes, crimson sash and saber. Even its gilt frame, elaborate to

the point of being baroque, could not detract from the forceful presence of that handsome male image.

On the bottom of the frame I saw an engraved metal plaque probably naming the painting's subject. I leaned forward, squinting to read it in the dim light—

Hollow and echoing out of the shadows of Dunhench Hall spoke a sepulchral voice. "*Who* are *you*?"

I admit I leapt like a startled deer, turning in midair towards that which had alarmed me.

In the shadows, I saw first a white shirt front, and then, as the man walked towards me, an impeccably clad figure so tall it could have been Sherlock—but no. I could now see a long, deferential face with an unfortunate nose and prominent, lugubrious eyes like those of a Pekingese.

"Miss?" inquired the butler—for he had to be the butler, standing with his hands behind his back, bowing slightly.

Reassuring myself that shadows hid the destruction Jezzie had wrought upon my costume, "I am The Honourable Ermintrude Basilwether," I answered as haughtily as I very well could, considering that I wanted to smile. "And you?"

"Brindle, Miss Basilwether. I regret to inform you that the family is not receiving visitors, miss."

"I assure you, Brindle, had I been aware the house was in mourning, I would never have ventured here," I fibbed, allowing my tone to grow a trifle friendlier, "but now that I am here, I must impose upon Dunhench hospitality, as my man has already driven away."

His lapdog eyes betrayed consternation, although the rest of his face remained impassive. "I am afraid I do not quite understand, miss."

I assumed an air of high-class impatience held in check. "Might I be seated and partake of some refreshment after my long journey?"

"Indeed, Miss, er, Basilwether. Of course, miss." After taking my carpetbag and parasol to set them aside, he showed me through the tall, gloomy hall and into a parlour of less imposing size but just as gloomy, what with the drapes drawn and all the mirrors covered with black crape. Seating me at a pedestal table, he excused himself and hurried out. My

chair, a tall and stalwart oaken antique, was none too comfortable, but I waited patiently, glad of a chance to think. My intention had been to stay at The Three Finches Inn, but might I not, after all, find out more at Dunhench Hall?

I had decided I most certainly must try when tea arrived. Carrying a well-laden tray, in bustled a stout, middle-aged, smiling woman who exuded a comfortable, motherly air despite her dull black bombazine dress. “I’m Dawson, the housekeeper, miss,” she said, bobbing her head to me as she set down the tray and started laying out an admirable refection for me: a cup of beef bouillon, a plate of sandwiches, buttery pound cake, vanilla wafers, salted almonds, lemonade, chocolate-covered cherries, and, of course, tea. Standing by with her hands folded over her apron, she nodded approval as, drawing off my gloves and laying them aside, I ate far more heartily than a lady ought.

“Have you come a long way, miss?” she asked as she poured for me.

“Only from London, but I have been exceedingly vexed and insulted.” I had decided to act the part of an offended upper-class eccentric. “I traveled to Threefinches with the simple and innocent purpose of doing some genealogical research, and I quite expected to stop at the inn, but no sooner had I arrived than they sent me packing as if they thought me a woman of ill repute! Merely because I am of age to travel without a chaperone!”

Like a large black hen, Dawson made comfortable clucking sounds. Also, she began to show signs of scuttling away, but I forestalled her.

“Dawson, could you tell me, please, who has passed away to put this house in mourning?”

Her folded hands became prayerful. “Most unhappily, Lady Felicity Dunhench, miss.”

“Oh, dear! Lady Dunhench herself? I am so sorry to hear of it. Was she well advanced in years?”

Shaking her head, Dawson began to show signs of distress. “No, miss, quite the opposite. A sweet young lady she was, taken away by a fearsome fever all sudden, within a day.”

I placed my hands to my mouth in feigned horror. The gentle reader will understand I had to pretend utter ignorance of anything to do with this matter. “How dreadful! When did this happen?”

“Just this Sunday past, like the angel she was.”

“So recently? The funeral must have been only yesterday!”

Instead of answering, Dawson blurted, “Excuse me, miss,” and bolted out of the room as if she smelled something burning. While the parlour door was still closing behind her I shot to my feet, crossed the room as noiselessly as possible, and eavesdropped, hoping conversation would ensue nearby.

It did. I heard the sepulchral tones of the butler, then the forthright voice of the housekeeper saying more audibly, “Passed her along to us from the inn, they did, afraid she might make a scandal, her with her skirt torn and her hat all knocked about like she been in a rumpus.”

I confess I blushed—for I had hoped my dishevelment had gone unnoticed—but I kept listening. The butler had spoken, and the housekeeper was replying, “She seems a right enough sort. Says she’s just doing some sort of gene—genie—some kind of research. But the last thing we need right now is a houseguest! What’s his lordship going to say when he sees her at the dinner table?”

“Sees who?” drawled an aristocratic, sardonic voice, male, that I had not heard before.

“Your Lordship!” gasped both housekeeper and butler simultaneously.

At times, I can be as prudent as the next person. This was one of those times. Soundlessly I abandoned my eavesdropping and retreated to the parlour table where I was supposed to be. As I seated myself, slipping my gloves back on and trying to assume a ladylike languor, I considered what an ironic blessing it was that the mirrors all around the room were covered—supposedly so that the soul of the departed might not blunder into one and get trapped inside the house, and in actuality so that I could not see what a fright I looked.

A moment later, as I dreaded and expected, the parlour door opened and the Earl of Dunhench made his entrance.

Chapter the Seventh

Soberly and impeccably clad in a grey broadcloth suit with a black mourning band around one sleeve, he posed in the doorway much as he must have posed for the portrait in the great hall; even minus his military regalia I recognized him at once, and acknowledged him to be nigh on swoonably handsome. Yet I did not much like the way he coolly looked me up and down, although I suppose it was to be expected; after all, I was a stranger invading his home.

After his pause, he crossed the short distance between us. “Miss Ermintrude Basilwether?”

I arose, but rather than curtseying, I offered him my gloved hand to shake. I wanted to put him off-balance a bit. But it was he who unbalanced me. Taking my outstretched hand in his, he bowed over it and kissed it.

Hastily I withdrew it, feeling the heat of a rosy blush in my face. “My lord!” I twittered, for my voice had shot up an octave or two, and my knees folded without my permission, seating me in my chair.

“Let us have some light in here,” he said, sounding impatient with the funereal gloom. He lit the table lamp, then sat across from me. “Please, Miss Basilwether, do tell me what adventure has befallen you to disorder your charming clothing?”

I heard no mockery in his voice, so why not? I told him my tale nearly in full, omitting only my actual intentions and my encounter with Sherlock. I intended to amuse the earl, and I did; he smiled at my description of Side Whiskers, grinned when I told him how Jezzie had jettisoned me in front of the pub, and chuckled over my contretemps with the innkeeper. If he were not constrained by being in mourning, I think he would have laughed out loud.

Yet I think only decorum, not grief, restrained him. While talking I had been watching his dark eyes nearly as black as his hair, and fascinating

eyes they were: intelligent, lustrous, large, widely spaced over high cheekbones. His portrait did not do justice to the curious gleam I sometimes glimpsed in them; I think no painter could. Outwardly, the Earl of Dunhench, impeccably correct, crisp of collar and smiling of face, looked like a paragon of civilized good taste. But something in the glint of his eyes hinted otherwise.

That, and something in his manner, some exceeding force of self. As I explained how I had arrived at Dunhench Hall and began to apologize for my intrusion, he interrupted. “Of course you must stop here for as long as you like; what else are you to do? But I quite forbid you to wear black; you are the only bright and interesting object I have seen in days. I will instruct Dawson to take the greatest good care of you.” He stood up, bowed, and left the room before I could get my mouth closed to speak.

★ ★ ★

The good Dawson commenced her care of me by leading me on a grand tour of Dunhench Hall, omitting nothing except, of course, the backstairs haunts of the servants. But morning room, main parlour, dining room, drawing room (more accurately *with*drawing room, where ladies could go to get away from cigar smoke), music room (its piano closed and draped with crape), billiard room, gun room, and library all were shown to me, and I made sure to smile, gaze, gasp, and exclaim as if I had never in my life seen any home so grand. Dunhench Hall really was in a class of its own in regard to elk antlers sprouting from the scagliola walls and bearskins on the parquet floors. But for me, the best was yet to come. We went up the rose-carpeted front stairs and into a moist, heavenly scented glass-roofed conservatory, flooded with sunlight (I suppose a greenhouse is exempt from being draped with crape) off of which opened a private parlour where, I suppose, Lord and Lady Rudcliff could enjoy the orchids in comfort. On the walls of this pleasant room hung a number of light and airy watercolour paintings, quite a relief to my eyes after the dark and dour oil portraits downstairs. “Oh, I love watercolours,” I exclaimed quite truthfully, admiring each in turn: Child with a puppy, boat beneath a willow, girl in a rose garden, woman reading, cat in a window—terribly

conventional subjects, yet beautifully done with grace of line and an unfailing eye for composition.

"Who painted these?" I cried, failing to find a signature on any of them.

"Why, Lady Dunhench did, Miss Basilwether." Dawson sounded subdued, mentioning the recently dear departed. "Quite the artist she was. Shall we go on? I believe you will like way the guest accommodations have been arranged."

I responded with the requisite enthusiasm, and we worked our way down a long corridor of bedrooms decorated and designated according to all the hues of the rainbow, although the red bedroom was called The Poppy Room, the orange one was Apricot, et cetera. All were indeed marvels to behold if one fancied such a close conspiracy of the same colour in different patterns for walls, floors, drapes, lamps, and bedcovers.

"Which one would you prefer to have, dear? Um, Miss Basilwether?"

"Oh, I cannot possibly make up my mind!"

"We'll put you in The Fern Room, to match your dress."

"I quite like green," I acknowledged, "but this dress is ruined."

"Not at all, dear—I mean, Miss Basilwether. We can replace that overskirt in two shakes of a little lamb's tail." Solicitously she took me by the elbow, propelling me down the corridor, then plied a key from the ring of them she carried on her belt, letting me into yet another room—or suite of rooms: boudoir, dressing room, bedroom, decorated with exquisite taste in a range of soothing colours: peach, ecru, soft pink, cream, pale yellow, white. I saw delicate "ladies' chairs," carved, but with upholstered circular backs and seats, a couch that curved around a circular ottoman, lacy handmade lampshades. Over the dressing table hung a circular mirror framed in golden scallops. A remarkable white bedstead seemed designed to cup the sleeper almost like a boat. Even the wardrobes were painted white.

Dawson bustled to the wardrobes and opened them, but I stood still, my gaze fixed upon a large watercolour supported by an easel as if it had just been finished. "Are these Lady Dunhench's rooms?" I asked, feeling a bit peculiar at the thought, my voice sinking to a whisper as if I might disturb a ghost.

“Yes, Miss Basilwether.” Dawson plucked garments from the wardrobe.

“And she painted this watercolour?”

“Yes, miss.”

Indeed, Lady Felicity’s boudoir might better have been termed a studio, for it was fitted out with tables, baskets, and lazy Susans full of supplies. But the painting I was studying seemed oddly unlike any of the others I had seen of hers. It depicted a woman in a russet habit riding a bay horse, with a cottage and woods in the background, but the composition was dreadful. The horse’s nose nearly exited the left-hand side of the painting, leading the viewer’s eye outward and away, quite an elementary mistake. Nor did the painter seem interested in what a horse looked like, or a cottage; both were crudely done. And the background was filled with woods, flat and monotonous—why not a hill or two, some distant sheep, a vista? Even the trees of the woods looked clumsy, with straight limbs jutting at odd angles instead of forming graceful curves. I frowned, trying to make excuses for the talented Lady Felicity.

“Was this done a long time ago?” I asked Dawson.

Arms loaded with clothing, she turned towards me. “That? No, the paint’s hardly dry on that, miss. She did it the day she…” Dawson choked, failing to finish her sentence, and hustled past me without looking at the painting, seeming suddenly in a great hurry to exit the unfortunate lady’s chambers. “This way, miss,” she directed me, her voice quivering.

Following her out of the door, I finally realized her intention. “Surely you cannot expect me to wear the clothing of your so misfortunately expired mistress!”

“Why not, dearie? What does she need them for now?” Dawson sounded unwontedly familiar. More; she sounded, although quite calm, a bit hysterical.

“But I—I am quite tall, you know.”

“It won’t matter. Nothing matters.”

More than a bit hysterical. I judged it best to be silent, trailing after her to The Fern Room, following, like a good donkey, where I was led. But my mind had taken off galloping in several directions.

★ ★ ★

Dawson had a footman bring up my carpetbag and parasol and sent for a maid named Jill. Listening to Dawson give Jill some rather alarming instructions, I bent over so that neither would see what I was doing, slipped my dagger out of my corset and hid it deep in my carpetbag, firmly and silently assuring myself that it was unlikely Jill would discover that my bosom was filled with papers, pound notes, and other supplies; all should now be well.

Dawson helped me out of my green dress while Jill hung up my spare dress, a ruched nankeen frock, declaring it charming but not formal enough for dinner. Then, while Dawson set to work with scissors, needle, and thread, replacing my ripped overskirt with a similar one "borrowed" from one of the purloined gowns, Jill took on the challenge of making me presentable to dine with the earl, trying Flossie's evening gowns on me. Although they accommodated my girth, they were, as I had predicted, too short for me, and ways had to be found around this difficulty.

During these hours of sewing and fitting, it was quite natural for the housekeeper, the maid, and me to talk about fashion, and by complimenting Lady Felicity's wardrobe, I devised ways to ask questions about her. Jill and Dawson willingly and warmly spoke of her as a ray of sunshine, a songbird, and a blessed angel. Gently pressing them to be a bit more specific, I learned that Felicity liked to arrange flowers, drive her pony-phaeton around the park, and create fancy boxes out of seashells and the like. I learned that she preferred boysenberry jam on her breakfast scones, disliked kidneys whether or not they were served with beans, and adored ice cream. But as for details of her final illness and sad departure from this mortal realm, I could learn none. On that topic, the housekeeper and the maid were as indefinite as if we spoke of an imaginary person.

Most perplexing.

Nor could I blame their vagueness on stupidity, for both showed evidence of intelligence. Jill, for instance, made some of Flossie's gowns "work" on me by adding lace-up "waists" to cover that problem area. As for length, fashions had recently changed so much that skirts could now

stop just below the ankle instead of dragging on the ground, so all was well in that regard, although sweeping hemlines had to be straightened.

Finally Jill costumed me to her satisfaction in a wine-red frothy confection that bared my arms and collarbone. She then placed a filmy combing wrapper around my shoulders and began to address the problem of my wayward tresses. (I continued efforts to converse, turning the talk to Lord Cadogan; was he a master with foibles and failings? But I learned little.) After brushing my hair one hundred strokes in the hope of civilizing it, Jill subdued it sufficiently to coil it atop my head, securing it there with an army of metal clips and pins. Into my coif's interstices she poked pink silk roses to match the pink velvet waist concealing the muddle in the middle of the dress like a cummerbund. After removing the combing wrapper, she looked me over and declared me "ravishing," but asked whether I wanted my face and arms dusted with rice powder. I declined. Both she and Dawson declared me pretty as a picture and said it was a pity I could not see myself, as all the looking-glasses were shrouded. (Silently I begged to differ. No one had draped the mirror in Lady Felicity's bedchamber.) Then, bobbing, both Dawson and Jill allowed themselves to be dismissed, leaving me to myself and my own thoughts.

Those thoughts were various and disturbing, so much so that I extracted paper and pencil from my fussy wine-red bosom in order to write them down. I wrote:

- If Flossie expired due to such a virulent disease that her body had to be cremated, why is her bedroom not closed off, quarantined, fumigated?

- Why is the mirror in her room, and only her room, not draped with black?

- Why does her last watercolour look so odd?

- Why are Dawson and Jill so willing to dress me up in their late mistress's clothes?

- Why are they so vague about her demise?
- Why has the earl invited me to dine? He should be in deep mourning.
- How am I to let Sherlock know where I am?

Even after I hid this list in my wine-red bodice, my thoughts continued so restlessly that I could not abide the battling green decor of my bedroom anymore. Exiting, I wandered downstairs, found my way to the parlour with the pedestal table, and sat at it. As on every pedestal table in most parlours in England, there were displayed a redoubtable Bible, a Grecian goddess gracefully holding a plate for the collection of calling cards, a vase of flowers, several small photographs in freestanding oval frames, and a silver salver bearing the afternoon post. Topmost among the letters lay one with a typewritten address. Eyeing it curiously, I found that I recognized the return address, also typewritten. It was the letter Tish had said she would write to Caddie.

Exercising some mental discipline, as I had no good excuse if I were caught riffling through the mail, I turned my attention elsewhere. On this particular pedestal table lay a sizeable item that scarcely looked like a book, for its ornate intaglio-velvet covers puffed like upholstery. But when I picked up this peculiar cushiony thing, it opened in the middle, and I found myself gawking at photograph after photograph mounted by means of decorative cardboard corners upon thick black paper. Such was my first experience of a photograph album, and a fine one it was, beginning with smeared and blotched silvery daguerreotypes that had to date back to the beginning of photography, nearly fifty years ago. They represented Larimer Trask Rudcliff, fifth Earl of Dunhench, and his wife, Olga Thorpe Rudcliff.

After lighting a lamp so that I could see more properly, I skipped over several generations of Rudcliffs to study the more recent, sepia-toned likenesses, looking for my host, Cadogan Burr Rudcliff number two. And there he was in the requisite wedding photograph, the lady being his first wife, Myzella Haskell Rudcliff, so labeled. She wore a great deal of white

and seemed a bit smothered in point lace and orange blossoms. He wore a top hat and tails in which he somehow managed to look jaunty despite the need to maintain a pose for a full minute.

The next photograph was a death portrait of Cadogan Burr Rudcliff I, presumably Caddie's father, laid out in a casket so fine it might as well have been a sarcophagus.

Death portrait followed death portrait. Cadogan Burr Rudcliff III, who must have been Caddie's son, dead and swaddled in white at the age of two and a half. Then an old female Rudcliff, rather grand, who was perhaps Caddie's mother. Then a little girl, Angelica Myzella Rudcliff, surely his daughter, who had lived to be three before succumbing to diphtheria and being laid out in white ruffles and lace.

But then came another wedding portrait in which Cadogan Burr Rudcliff II stood tall beside Felicity Glover Rudcliff, aka Flossie. I recognized her at once, for she looked just like her twin, Letitia Glover, my client, although more feminized in her traditional white gown, cascades of lace, and a crown of rosebuds on her head to hold her veil.

More black pages remained to be filled, but that was the last photograph in the album. I closed it thoughtfully.

I had seen no death portrait of Flossie.

Even more telling: I had seen none of Caddie's first wife, Myzella.

This fact disturbed me. Greatly.

Chapter the Eighth

Dinner only increased my perturbation. A footman seated me—or rather enthroned me, on an ornate, heavy chair with arms—at one end of a long table formally laden with linen, crystal, and silver. And there I waited, eyeing the empty seat at the other end of the table.

Lord Cadogan Rudcliff came in unconscionably late, carrying the afternoon post and sorting through it. As I watched, he threw one letter—Tish's letter, the only typewritten one!—into the fire without opening it to read it. Well! Caddie *was* a cad.

He laid the post aside, turned, and bowed to me with exaggerated courtesy before his footman enthroned him opposite me. There must have been a hundred candles lit, on the table, the chandelier, the sideboard, yet the room seemed dark and enormous to me, and I was reminded of Little Lord Fauntleroy's first dinner with his ferocious grandfather. I felt quite as small as that angelic child, and fully as fictitious. I knew myself to be a sham, a clown in a borrowed gown, miserably aware of my bare, scrawny arms and neck.

"Are you well this evening, Miss Basilwether?" Lord Rudcliff inquired most politely and insincerely.

"Quite well, and grateful for your hospitality, my lord."

"Please, call me Caddie."

At that exact ill-fated moment, as he offered me this rather daunting intimacy and as I was being served a bowl of turtle soup, I noticed the elegant silver-plated epergne centred on the table, no larger or more tastelessly ornate than most such fripperies, yet more disturbing to behold. Its molded stem did not depict the usual swans, shepherd boys, or cherubs. Instead, it duplicated the statue I had seen in front of Dunhench Hall! My host's table was decorated with a proud and shining miniature of himself.

I had not until that moment realized that the statue out front *was* Caddie. The existence of the statue had slipped my mind until I saw the epergne. But the combination in my mind of the statue, the vainglorious portrait in the main hall, and now the epergne—all indicated to me that Caddie fancied himself even more greatly than I had suspected.

Rendered perverse by the thought but maintaining a mask of ladylike imbecility, I peered down the candlelit table and chirped, “Oh! What a lovely centrepiece! You must admire Lord Byron very much.”

“Lord Byron? Hardly!” My host reacted heatedly. “Lord Byron was a molly boy with a clubfoot!”

All innocence, I blinked across the distance that separated us. “But your epergne looks just like him.”

I am pleased to say I made him blush. Even he, for all his force of ego, did not have the effrontery to explain that the object in question was fashioned after himself. He blurted, “Never mind the blasted epergne!” But in no more time than it takes to turn the page of a book, he regained his manners and his practiced charm. “Enough about me. Tell me about yourself, Ermintrude.” He helped himself to my first name as readily as he helped himself to some biscuit to go with his soup. “Where were you brought up?”

“Just about anywhere between Wales and Scotland.” I tried to change the subject, referring to the excellent soup I was eating: “I have always regarded turtle soup as rather a mystery. How in the world does one skin a turtle?”

“I think that is something a lady should not really want to know. Tell me, Ermintrude, are you related to the Essex Basilwethers of Belvidere?”

Oh, dear. My choice of alias, I realized, had been most unwise under the circumstances. “Distantly,” I answered, and luckily the arrival of the fish saved me from further conversation for the time being. Different wines were served with each course, but I sipped only water.

“Do you not care for wine, Ermintrude? Has anyone ever called you Trudy?”

I skipped the first question in favour of answering the second one. “Certainly not if they wished to escape bodily harm.”

He laughed far too heartily for a recently bereaved husband, increasing my unease. There was something shrewd, calculating, even predatory in the focus of his eyes and his attention on me.

“My mother was a friend of her most gracious grace, Wilhelmina, Duchess of Basilwether,” he said. “Such a grand lady.”

Hearing mockery in his tone, and having no idea what Tewky’s mother’s name was, although “Wilhelmina” seemed far too old-fashioned, I found myself in a quandary. I could not safely say I had never heard of Lady Wilhelmina, although it was entirely possible that he had made her up. So, cautiously, I said, “Of course I know the duke and duchess. Was Wilhelmina his mother’s name?”

“Yes, indeed! And what relation is she to you? Your grandmother?”

“My great-aunt.”

“Indeed? How very peculiar, as she never existed.”

It was my turn to blush, and blush I did, furiously; he had well and truly skewered me. “Oh, well,” I babbled, “perhaps I was thinking of my great-aunt Mehitabel. I have never been good at keeping track of relationships.”

“And yet you have come to Threefinches to research your family tree?”

Confound and blast! Hoist by my own petard! But I had to say something. With as much dignity as I could muster I stated, “I intend to master my own shortcoming.”

He laughed again, heartily and not very pleasantly. But whilst I was trying to decide whether to take offense and make a frosty exit, the footmen came in with the “joint,” meaning the meat course, which was in actuality a jugged hare accompanied by mashed turnips. Even had the fare been more to my taste, I had by then lost all appetite. But I pretended great interest in the contents of my plate, and did not look up at the occupant of the other end of the table for a considerable while.

He cooperatively remained silent, accommodating my sulk. And at last, of course, there came a time when I *had* to see what he was up to and lifted my gaze to glance at him.

He was sitting quite at his ease, elbows most uncouthly on the table, smiling in a wolfish way. “So, my dear,” he inquired in a most by-the-way manner, “Who are you, really?”

“I am not your dear,” I retorted, before I even realized the full implications of his question.

“Very well, but who *are* you, sitting at my dinner table all dressed up in my wife’s second-best evening gown?”

I glowered, partly because he had mentioned poor Felicity in such a tearless, offhand way, but mostly because I did not know how to answer. Never before had I found myself so ignominiously outfoxed.

Lord Cadogan grinned down the length of the table at me. I quite wanted to throw something at him.

“Let me help,” he said in a way that sounded far more triumphant than helpful. “Having made a lifelong study of females, I believe you are much younger than you pretend to be. Because you are tall, you have been able to pass as a woman, when actually you are hardly more than a little girl, isn’t that so? You are a runaway from a strict papa, aren’t you?”

Of all his verbiage, one phrase struck me as a most curious thing to say. “A lifelong study of females?”

He ceased any pretense of being nice. “Answer me! You are a runaway, are you not?”

“Indeed I must be, as you are an expert and you say so.”

“Do not trifle with me!” He stood up, and that hint of danger I had seen in the glint of his eyes now glared. I had faced many an angry man, but there was something different, something terrifying in the furious self-will of this oh-so-handsome aristocrat menacing me. “What is your name?”

Because he frightened me, I answered too pertly. “Why? What do you do with runaways?”

Lowering his head like a charging bull, he started towards me. “I lock them up until they beg to go home!”

He looked as if he intended to lay hands on me! Bolting to my feet, I reached for the dagger I always carried in my dress front—confound it! This dress had no front, and I had no dagger. Turning to flee, I collided with a footman who had just come in carrying the dessert tray. Like a chocolate-and-vanilla volcano, custard erupted onto me, him, and I hope the Earl of Dunhench, although I did not see. I only heard him order, not even loudly, “Seize her.”

The footmen obeyed without the slightest hesitation, as if their master had directed them to remove a dish from the table; I wondered what unspeakable tasks they might have undertaken for him in the past.

“Lock her in her room.”

Off I went lodged between the two men who had hold of me by the arms. I struggled, of course, but I could not wriggle as I would have liked, because the scanty and flimsy evening gown I wore would have slithered right off of me. And I could not scream, because the loathsome Caddie came along behind us with his hand over my mouth so tightly that I could not even manage to bite him.

But there came a moment when I would have cheerfully stopped struggling, and needed to remind myself to keep on writhing. And when they had shoved me inside the room, locked me in, and gone away, I needed to exert myself to pound on the imprisoning door, shouting after them, “You should be ashamed of yourselves! You, Dunhench, you are no gentleman!”

Then I turned up the gaslight and allowed myself to smile. It is true that I felt a degree of chagrin, having been treated so, but my humiliation was offset by elation, because I found myself exactly where I most wished to be. Rudcliff and his bullying boobies, evidently having failed to confer with Dawson, had locked me in the wrong room. Perhaps because I wore Lady Felicity’s dress, and from that they had made a false assumption, they had locked me into Lady Felicity’s chambers.

Chapter the Ninth

Searching has always been the passion of my life. As a child, I searched the woods of Ferndell, for whatever I might find—bright pebbles, a magpie nest, a skeleton? Now, sloughing off my borrowed finery and putting on a dressing gown, I looked forward to searching Lady Felicity's chambers in much the same spirit.

First, however, catching sight of myself in the large, circular mirror over her dresser, I stood still a moment, frowning. Surely if the lady had passed away in this room, hers would have been the first mirror covered? Yet it seemed as if those in all public areas of the hall had been draped while this one was overlooked.

It followed, therefore, that she had not passed away, or at least not here.

Hmm.

Tucking the thought away to be brought out later, I set about hunting with no idea what I was looking for. I peeked into all the milk-glass flasks and jars on her dresser, then lifted the linen dresser scarf in case some paper might be concealed beneath. I searched beneath petticoats and stockings in her dresser drawers. I crossed to her desk, examined her inkwell, read notes she had written ("Need alizarin crimson, Payne's grey, rose madder, indigo") and examined her blotter for traces of any revealing words in mirror image; there were none. I looked through her wardrobe, then behind that heavy piece of furniture, then behind her mirror and all the pictures on her walls. I turned up the corners of her carpet. I checked the circular upholstered backs and seats of her lightweight chairs for secret pockets. I examined the solidity of her four-poster bed, got down on my knees to look under it, and even pulled out the fancy porcelain chamber pot I found there.

Crossing and re-crossing the rooms like a foxhound trying to pick up a scent, I passed in front of Lady Felicity's peculiar watercolour painting,

uplifted on its easel, perhaps a dozen times, and each time I glanced at it and frowned, for something about its graceless lines tugged at the corner of my eye. Why had she painted something so—so uncharacteristically awkward, not to say ugly?

Finally I lit a candle to stand in front of it and have a closer look at it, at that oddly positioned horse, those jagged trees shaped like—

Oh, my stars and garters.

Shaped like capital letters.

Lady Felicity's painting was an exceedingly clever cipher.

Once I became aware of the letters in the trees, I saw them all at once, ranged across the top of the painting: INANE.

Inane?

I looked at the bottom of the painting for something more, hoping for clarification. In order to define the letters in the trees, I now perceived, Lady Dunhench—no, Flossie; I had begun to think of her affectionately—Flossie had subtly picked them out with Conté crayon. How very resourceful, as Conté crayon was commonly used to emphasize shadows in watercolour. I searched for touches of Conté crayon on the lower part of the picture and at once found an *A* in the lower part of the horse's head and neck, with its reins being the crossbar. Then hints along the rider's habit and her booted foot in the stirrup showed me a rather elongated S. The horse's haunch and hock: *Y.* The corner of the cottage: L. Its door, a squared-off *U.* Its window with crisscross curtains: *M.*

ASYLUM.

Oh. Oh, please, no. But at the same time my eyes flew back to the top of the picture, seeking the missing letter, and finding it in the overlapping branches of the trees, angular like a backwards *Z* but still, I could now see, an *S.*

INANE ASYLUM? Hardly. The actual message was INSANE ASYLUM.

Oh. Oh, merciful heavens, no. I felt my entire personage go freezing cold at the thought. But oh, dreadful fate, yes, it could be true, for this, I understood now, was the meaning of the black barouche, the baleful carriage conveying body snatchers who came in the night to carry their victims away to a fate more cruel than death.

★ ★ ★

I was still standing there, frozen in horror, when someone knocked on the door, making me jump even though the tapping sound was gentle, almost timid.

“Who is it?” I called once I had my voice under control.

“It’s Dawson, Miss Ermintrude. Oh, Miss Ermintrude, I went to fold down the bedcovers for you and what did I find but they locked you in here! I had nothing to do with it, Miss Ermintrude!”

“It’s all right, Dawson.” Like a good and proper eccentric aristocrat, I treated imprisonment as a trifle. “I shall be quite all right if you could just bring me my own clothes from the other room. I should much prefer to sleep in my own nightgown.”

Actually, I had no intention of sleeping. I meant, somehow, to get out. But I had no wish to do so half naked, as none of Flossie’s things fit me.

Dawson whimpered. “But, Miss Ermintrude, I don’t dare put a key to this door. If you take advantage of me to make an escape, I’ll be sacked for sure and tossed out to starve like a stray cat!”

Stiffly I said, “I promise you, Dawson, I am above trickery. I shall stand over by the windows. You may speak to me to make sure of me, then just open the door a crack and thrust the things in before you lock it again.”

“All right, I—I’ll try, dear.”

My voice softened greatly. “Thank you, Dawson.”

While she was gone, I paced the room, retracing my thoughts and questioning my conclusions, for the idea of a black barouche sweeping a lady away into the night seemed terribly melodramatic—but, in actuality, it need not be black or a barouche. A brougham, landau, victoria, phaeton, or any other carriage would serve the purpose. I had heard whispers that commitment to a lunatic asylum was all too often the fate of inconvenient women. Any man of means who wished to rid himself of a female encumbrance could have her committed for any of a plethora of reasons: nervousness, pride, reading French novels, consulting mediums, fear of darkness, failure to obey, suppression of perspiration, excessive laughter—any form of hysteria would do. All he needed in order to do so were the

signatures of two doctors, one of whom could be the man who ran the hellish place. The wife thus disposed of—generally it was a wife—was then forgotten for all practical purposes.

But how could Flossie possibly have known that this was to be her fate?

Yet she had. There could be no mistaking the cipher in her watercolour. Also, now that I thought about it, although my search of Flossie's room had yielded no other clues, yet it had. The items I had *not* found were significant by their absence. In no conceivable way could certain essential feminine unmentionables have gone to the grave—or the crematorium—along with Flossie. But if she were yet alive, and had been stolen away somewhere, well, of course she would have need of certain personal items, even if she might never again wear an evening gown.

There must have been a hundred lunatic asylums in England. Where, oh *where,* had they taken her?

And how, oh how, was I ever going to find out?

★ ★ ★

The more immediate question was: How was I going to get out of Dunhench Hall, specifically, the chambers into which I was locked?

Until after Dawson had delivered my carpetbag, hat, parasol, et cetera, I could not think clearly about this problem, because I knew the sensible thing to do would be to cat-foot over to the door as Dawson opened it, overpower her, take the key from her, and lock her up in my stead.

But I had promised not to trick her.

Nonsense. All I had to do was gag her mouth so that she would not scream, and in order for her to remain gagged, I would have to tie her hands behind her.

But how long would it be before someone found her?

Nevertheless!

But what of decency, honour—

And so quarreled my mind until the chance was gone and I had thanked Dawson and let her lock the door again. Confound her for being a nice woman; she simply did not deserve to be bound and gagged, have trouble brought upon her, or be sacked to starve like a stray cat.

One would think the fray within my mental faculties would then cease, but no. *Confound you for being a fool, Enola!* shrieked a combative thought, causing me to feel upset—with myself?

How absurd. *You will do quite well on your own, Enola.* Almost as if hearing it speak from the grave, I remembered my mother's voice.

Instantly calm, I began to think clearly once again, and to act upon my thoughts.

First, I clothed myself, not in a nightgown, but in my own comfortable and modest green day-dress, newly mended. Then I put out the lights as if I had gone to bed. I stationed myself by a window, listening for any footsteps passing in the hallway. When there were none, and when my eyes had grown able to see somewhat in the darkness, I pulled open the draperies that had been shut since Flossie's "unfortunate demise," in order to peer outside.

It was quite a dark night, unlit by moon or even stars. I could see very little except the portico, which was glorified by gas lanterns flanking the front door.

The darkness could work either for me or against me, but it did not change my options for escape. I could think of four possibilities:

- Number one: Climb up inside the chimney like a sweep—and I quite liked to climb, nor did I mind dirt, but what if I became stuck? I was slender, but perhaps not quite slender enough, as chimney sweeping was generally done by young boys.

- Two: Slide down the laundry chute to the basement—but then I would still need to find a way out of the basement. And, again, sliding down laundry chutes is usually an activity for children. I studied the opening with the same doubt I felt towards the chimney: What if I became stuck?

- Three: Climb out of the window and—as my view of the portico told me I was located in the modern wing, where there were no vines to assist me down—as an alternative, could I stand on the windowsill, grasp the eaves, and somehow swing

myself up onto the roof, whence I could clamber over to the old manse and its ivy? Still looking out the window, I shuddered and shook my head; extremely risky, both the swinging and the clambering. I quite agreed with Darwin that I was related to chimpanzees, but I lacked opposable digits on my feet.

- Four: Climb out the window and down. But how? I peered and peered to no avail. The stone walls were not so rough-hewn as to provide footholds. I saw no drainpipe, no handy buttress, and alas, no ivy. How would I ever be able to climb down?

Then the answer came to me, so ridiculously simple that I smacked myself on the forehead for not having thought of it sooner.

I would climb down the good old-fashioned way, by improvising a rope out of bedclothes knotted together.

Chapter the Tenth

Of course I had to wait until the nadir of night, when the denizens of Dunhench would be slumbering their deepest, and I could not light a lamp for fear of alerting someone to my activities, but during the hours that passed I became neither sleepy nor bored; I was busy fastening bedcovers corner to corner. Like many tasks, this turned out not to be nearly as simple as it seemed, especially not in the dark. I tied sheet to sheet to coverlet to coverlet to crewel-embroidered counterpane as best I could, pulling hard to tighten the knots, only to find that when I tested them, they parted as if by magic. No doubt, I thought sourly, my brother Sherlock had written a monologue on the superior knots used by sailors and mountain climbers, but as neither he nor his monologue were there with me in my prison, what was I to do?

Enola, think, said my mother's ghost in my mind.

I thought, and I remembered the modern "safety pins" I had noticed in the top drawer of Lady Felicity's dressing table, surely kept there for the purpose of holding things together in an emergency.

Aha.

Mentally I thanked both Flossie and my mother as I applied these formidable and reassuring pins to my knots, including those of the drapery panels I had added to my rope, and especially the all-important supporting quadruple knot I had tied to the bedpost. Then I put on my hat, secured it with the usual hatpins, fastened my carpetbag to my waist with the cloth belt from Flossie's purple dressing gown, inserted my parasol therein, opened the window and flung my approximate rope out through it, and, necessarily exiting the window backwards, I set forth.

As I am quite experienced at climbing, I scooted rapidly down sheets, coverlets, counterpane et cetera, and my celerity was fortunate, for my makeshift "rope" parted before I was quite finished with it, and I fell.

Experience of similar situations previously helped me not to scream. And, as luck would have it, I did not fall very far. Almost immediately I landed on soft grass, taking the impact on that portion of my anatomy best padded to withstand such accidents. I stood up, brushed myself off, and considered my options regarding how to get back to Threefinches.

A bicycle? Ludicrous; no one was likely to have left one outdoors in readiness for me. A horse? In the stable, there would be a watchdog that would bark at me, thus rousing the boys asleep in the loft. However, I might find a horse in a pasture somewhere—and ride it bareback? So it could run away with me, like Jezzie? No, thank you.

My transportation, it seemed, would be shank's mare.

Once decided, I strode, indeed I nearly ran, towards the drive, visible by the light of the portico lamps. In passing, I made a very childish face at Caddie's statue, sticking out my tongue. Then, turning my back on Dunhench Hall, I hurried towards its gates.

The night remained so dark that at first I could see nothing except my own shadow, and shortly I could see nothing at all. I remained on the drive only by listening for the crunch of gravel under my feet and correcting course when I strayed onto the grass. Also, I retrieved my parasol from my carpetbag and waved it from side to side in front of me in case I encountered an obstacle, although I thought there should be none except the gate.

Regarding the gate, I felt no great concern. I could climb over it, although it would be difficult, partly because of the darkness but mostly because of my skirt, likely to catch on some wrought-iron doodad. Confound skirts, which seemed designed by malicious intent to prevent women from doing *anything* adventuresome, let alone climbing gates—

Wait. I could see the gate.

Backlit by some small light, the mighty filigree of metal, a masculine mockery of lacework, loomed a short distance ahead of me.

Moreover, I whiffed something that smelled of hot tin—a lantern. And as my eyes adjusted to the unexpected presence of illumination, I could make out a silhouette blending in with that of the gate, the form of a tall,

thin man standing—No, as I watched he stooped, almost crouching, unmistakably furtive in his movements.

My hand crept towards the hilt of the dagger sheathed in the front of my corset. But I did not touch it, because I began to formulate some interesting notions. Reminding myself that it is a capital mistake to theorize in advance of sufficient data, I took a long step sideways to get off the lane and onto its grass verge. Then, holding my breath and stepping soundlessly on the grass, I stalked closer to the unidentified person. I could now see that his was a dark lantern, casting light on only one side that could be slid open or closed. Such was the sort of equipment a person might use who was, I could now see, attempting to pick open the padlock on the gates.

As he moved slightly, by the light of his lantern I got a clear look at his profile beneath the brim of a deerstalker hat.

Smiling, I called to him softly. “Never mind, Sherlock. I can climb over.”

I rejoiced to see him startle like a hare—which indeed he resembled in that hat with its bow on top like rabbit ears. Bolting upright, he caused a clash of metal as he kicked his lantern into the gate.

“Shhh!” he hissed as if I were the one who had created such an unfortunate clatter. But it was too late for either of us to shush. Out of the darkness sprang a thin shaft of candlelight—quite close at hand, moving towards what seemed to be a window—

The lodge-keeper’s cottage!

There was no time to smite myself for being a ninny. Yanking my skirt up above my knees, I ran to the gate and scaled it in the moment it took Sherlock to slide his lantern closed so no one could see us in the night.

Nor, alas, could we see anything at all.

I felt my brother hoist me under the shoulders as I reached the top of the gate, and he hauled me over as if I weighed nothing at all. My skirt caught on something, of course. He ripped me free and ran, still carrying me quite jouncily.

“Put me down,” I complained.

He did so, but only because he tripped over something and fell, hurling me to the ground in the process. Lying on my back with the breath knocked out of me, I felt the most peculiar, overlarge tickling sensation on my face. Had the source of discomfort not snorted upon me, thereby identifying itself as a horse, I think I would have screamed once I had caught my breath. But instead, I sat up, and the beast began to eat my hat. I started to push the annoyance away, then changed my mind, took hold of its bridle's cheek strap, and hauled myself to my feet. "Sherlock?" I whispered to the night, a sudden quaver of fear in my voice—had he hit his head? Had he hurt himself? Was he lying nearby with a broken neck?

I could not see him. But, flickering through what seemed to be woods, I did see lantern light—the lodge-keeper, looking for us.

A familiar and peremptory voice ordered, "This way, Enola. Get in the cart!"

Feeling my way along the horse towards his voice, I whispered, "Are you all right?"

"Get in the *cart*!" A thin, sinewy, and surprisingly strong hand came down from somewhere above the horse's tail, grasped my arm, and lifted me. I flailed, encountered a structure of wood, and found myself sprawling approximately on or in it as Sherlock turned the horse and flicked the whip, and we trundled away.

★ ★ ★

Trundled, I say, because in the dark we could not go dashing off; indeed, I do not know how Sherlock was able to guide the horse at all. Perhaps the horse guided *him.* Horses exhibit an uncanny willingness and sense of direction when returning to their stables.

After a few minutes Sherlock stopped the horse, secured the reins, and got down to light the lanterns on each forward corner of the cart. By then I had gotten myself organized into some degree of verticality. Judging by Sherlock's actions there was no longer any need for stealth or silence, so I asked, "Whatever became of Tom Dubbs?" Sherlock wore his own hair and the country tweeds of a gentleman.

“Tom Dubbs served his purpose.” Sherlock climbed back onto the cart and took up the reins again, clicking his tongue to urge the horse into a trot. “That lodge-keeper has apparently gone to report to his master,” he added. “Do you think we will be pursued?”

“Doubtful. Lord Caddie hardly strikes me as energetic. And even if he does send someone after us, we have little to fear, now that you are no longer a humble scion of the soil, but your masterful self.”

“True.” With a single word he acknowledged the authority of the great Sherlock Holmes.

I rolled my eyes towards the starless sky. “While you were Tom Dubbs, did you discover the circumstances surrounding the supposed demise of Lady Felicity Rudcliff?”

“No, but Tom Dubbs heard all about a mysterious young female being held as a runaway in Dunhench Hall. The hall servants could scarcely wait to make you the talk of Threefinches. And I was not sure whether I could trust Dunhench, womanizer that he is, to deliver you over to the constabulary in the morning.”

“Thank you for coming to get me … but what were you planning to do once you got the gate open, for heaven’s sake?”

“It hardly matters now, does it?” In other words, Sherlock had no idea. “I suppose you climbed down the ivy?”

“It hardly matters.” Ever so demure, I tucked my chin. “However, my visit to Dunhench Hall, although brief, was fruitful. I have reason to believe that our client’s sister is alive, but has been committed to a lunatic asylum, and we must rescue her before she comes to harm.”

I hoped for exclamations, but I got none. Sherlock merely asked, as blandly as if he were inquiring about a misdirected parcel, “Which lunatic asylum?”

“She didn’t say. And from the fact that she didn’t say, I infer one of two possible conclusions: either she didn’t know, or the name of the asylum would not have fit onto the painting.”

“Enola,” he said in what might possibly have been construed as an affectionate tone, “you have gotten into Watson’s deplorable habit of

telling your stories backwards. Start at the beginning, please, and give me an orderly account of your findings."

So I did, and darkness hid my blushes as I explained about the unmentionables that were missing from Lady Felicity's chambers. I also told him about the mirror that had not been covered, the death portraits absent from the photograph album, and the odd behaviour of the servants, specifically Dawson. I explained at length the message I had discovered hidden in the watercolour, and I conveyed my impression that Lord Caddie was not a very nice man. As I spoke, I watched as the swaying light from the cart lanterns showed me glimpses of fences, hedges, and grassy slopes, beyond which all remained dark.

Too much of Lady Felicity's story also remained dark in my mind. "I am very curious to see what darling Caddie has filed by way of a death certificate. The moment the registrar's office opens in the morning, I want to be there."

Sherlock said, "No need. I will take care of it."

"I want to go."

"The registrar is likely to be more helpful to me."

By virtue of his gender and his top hat this was true, which infuriated me.

"I shall go. You may come along if you like."

"Thank you," he said, his tone owlish.

"You're welcome."

Chapter the Eleventh

We stayed for the remainder of the night at the inn—the very same inn that had so rudely turned me away when I lacked a brother—and in the morning, after only a few hours of sleep, we prepared to visit the registrar, unwilling to delay lest Lord Cadogan create some sort of unpleasantness after all, once he had finished his breakfast.

I experienced some difficulty regarding my costume. My green dress was once more and yet again ruined. Necessarily I wore my other one, which was buttercup yellow. However, as a female past the liberties of childhood, I could not be seen in public without a hat, and as I had only my battered one with the green ribbons, I chopped away those ruined trimmings then plopped the hat on my head in a shockingly shabby and unadorned condition, assuring myself that I could resume being fashionable when I got back to London.

Which turned out to be sooner than I expected, because of what the registrar dredged up from his records for us. Corpulent king of his paperwork empire, he responded to our requests—Sherlock's for the marriage and death records of Myzella Haskell Rudcliff, mine for the same for Felicity Glover Rudcliff—he produced the documents sluggishly enough to show us that he, and not we, ruled here in Threefinches.

No matter. In his own good time he handed them over. Judging from what I could see, marriage was recorded in a squarish format on creamy paper with quite a florid border, while death came on long and narrow paper that was dark grey and engraved more grimly.

While Sherlock stood looking over Myzella's records, I sat on the registrar's hard bench and studied Flossie's, making notes—the name of the clergyman who had married her, date, et cetera—but I felt much more interested in her supposed demise. The record of death told me that her unfortunate end had been reported by her husband, whose occupation was

noted as *Earl of Dunhench* and hers as *Wife*; she had been twenty years old, and the cause of her death had been fever. The informant (Caddie) was described as *lordship in apparent good health, not yet of middle age, composed and condescending in manner* while his residence was dealt with more briefly: *Dunhench Hall*. Then, as required by law, fastened to the gloomy grey registration of death was a Medical Certificate of Death.

It listed Flossie's cause of death as fever, unspecified.

It was signed by John H. Watson, M.D.

Dr. Watson? *Our* friend Watson?

It was not inconceivable. Surrey was a short distance from London. And how many medical doctors named John H. Watson might there be in England?

Trying hard not to squeak or ogle, I got up and showed the paper to Sherlock. His eyebrows fairly levitated.

"What physician signed for Rudcliff's first wife?" I asked.

"None. A medical certificate of death was not required by law until ten years ago. Lord Rudcliff simply reported that Lady Myzella succumbed to brain fever. I think we should be on our way back to London, don't you?"

I certainly did.

★ ★ ★

We did not discuss the matter within earshot of anyone in Threefinches, and we waited until a hired hack had driven us back to Dorking before we sent telegraphs, one to Miss Letitia Glover asking her to call at 221B Baker Street sometime after four p.m., and one to Dr. Watson asking him to leave word whether he had recently, or ever, signed a death certificate for Felicity Glover Rudcliff, Lady Dunhench. Then we took the next train into London. Sherlock and I secured a compartment to ourselves.

Finally, I could speak with him privately. "You would know Watson's signature if you saw it, would you not?"

"I am reasonably sure I would, and that what you showed me was not in his handwriting. But we must wait for proof before we discuss the matter any further."

He fell into a brooding silence, while I, never one to concern myself with propriety, put my feet up and fell asleep until we reached Victoria Station.

There we went our separate ways, Sherlock to inquire at Dr. Watson's office, and I to my lodging in the Professional Women's Club to put on a different hat! But first to have a wash, and brush my hair, and change my dress, et cetera. When, much later in the day, I reported back to Baker Street, I was irreproachable in russet delaine trimmed with muted gold, with, of course, a simply ravishing hat in the latest fashion. Worn on the back of the head, it tilted up to a peak in front with a froth of autumn-coloured flowers tucked underneath the brim.

"That thing you're wearing looks like a frigate in need of a figurehead," said Sherlock when I entered his sitting room. He, of course, wore impeccable city attire that had varied little in the past decade.

"Good afternoon to you, too. Have you heard from Watson?"

"Not yet."

"Bother." Laying my gloves and parasol aside, I appropriated a seat at his desk so I could draw a picture that I felt was likely to be needed soon. Shortly afterwards, I heard the front doorbell, and Miss Letitia Glover was shown up by Mrs. Hudson.

"Miss Glover." Sherlock took her gloved hand in his and bowed over it with utmost courtesy.

"Hello, Miss Glover." I shook her hand, and she smiled as if she appreciated my greeting more. Dressed as before, in a mannish fashion but feminine hues—on this day, plum and peach pink—she gazed at me in appeal, her face pale despite the rosy hue of her collar, her wide eyes fraught with anxiety.

Wishing only to comfort her, I exhorted, "Do not despair, Miss Glover! We have every reason to believe your sister is alive, just as you said."

"There are perhaps some slight indications," Sherlock amended, his tone most quelling. "Please be seated, Miss Glover."

She did so, but at the same time she found her voice, exclaiming as she looked from Sherlock to me and back again, "Oh! But what have you found out? Please tell me at once!"

Sherlock gave me a glance that spoke as plainly as words, assigning to me the task of speaking with the winsome young woman, as it was I who had raised her hopes.

I pulled my chair closer to our client's. Sitting nearly knee to knee with Miss Glover, I told her, "I have been to Dunhench Hall, and made the acquaintance of Lord Cadogan Rudcliff, and found him to be superficially charming but at times most unpleasant. For instance, I saw him throw your letter into the fire without reading it."

She gasped, and her gloved hands flew to her mouth.

"Also, for no particular reason he locked me into a bedroom—your sister's bedroom."

Tish Glover's eyes went nearly black, their pupils widened so. I leaned towards her to encourage her confidence. "Miss Letitia, do you paint as well as your sister does?"

"No, I could never!" Tish's hands left her mouth to describe loops and whorls in the air as she spoke of her sister's talent. "Flossie depicts so accurately whatever subject she chooses, but not only that, she has a genius for composition! She tried to explain to me about the golden ratio and how to translate it into an outward spiral like a snail shell, but I am quite incapable of understanding! Still, I can see how her paintings order themselves along graceful proportions and curves."

I nodded vigorously. "Such, exactly, was my observation of her artwork. Therefore I sensed something odd when I perceived this—please pardon the crudeness of my rendition—when I found a painting like this upon the easel in her studio—I mean, her boudoir."

Tish ogled the pencil sketch I showed her with a fair degree of repulsion. "Why, what could Flossie mean by painting that?"

"My thought exactly. But after looking closely, I saw that she had picked out certain areas in Conté crayon, thus." Holding the sketch against a book, I penciled for her its hidden letters. Standing behind Miss Glover's chair, Sherlock watched as well. As I spelled out INSANE ASYLUM, Tish covered her mouth again, stifling a choked sound.

Sherlock murmured, "Extraordinary."

“Yes,” I agreed, “most extraordinary. She must have guessed somehow that her husband was scheming to put her away.”

Sherlock quibbled, “Unless she was referring to her predecessor, Lady Myzella.”

Tish choked back a sob again. “Sherlock,” I told my brother with some asperity, “don’t be such an egghead. I am sure Flossie is alive, on the evidence of the things that are missing from her dresser drawers.”

Tish caught her breath then held it as she reached out for me with her gaze. Sherlock said mulishly, “What things, exactly?”

He thought he would make me blush? Confound him. Without hesitation I shot back, “Things that a young lady *who is alive* needs once a month.”

He was the one who blushed, and his red face with its aristocratic white beak was most gratifying to behold in the moment before he turned away.

Tish wailed, “But where is she? *Which* insane asylum?”

“That, indeed, is the problem.” Sherlock quickly regained control, and would have elaborated, I am sure, except that just then the front bell rang, and we all turned silent as statues, listening.

A moment later we heard boyish steps running up the stairs towards us. Sherlock went out to meet the messenger, then came back in carrying a slip of paper.

“It’s a note from Watson,” he said, “and it confirms both our suspicions and our hopes; he has never heard of Felicity Glover Rudcliff. Her certificate of death cannot be considered valid, for his signature upon it was forged.”

Chapter the Twelfth

Tish dreadfully wanted to find her sister that very day if not sooner, begging to know the name of every insane asylum in Surrey. While quite sympathizing with her, I thought Lord Cadogan would have been more likely to dispose of his wife a bit farther from home, in London, where there were lunatic asylums (formerly called madhouses), sanatoriums, mental hospitals, and variously named facilities for imbeciles, idiots, and other defectives, in plenty. Tish reminded me that her sister had specified "insane asylum." I opined that Flossie had chosen those two words for their brevity as opposed to, for instance, Saint Marlebone's Incarceratory for the Dangerously Crazed. Or Earlswood Asylum for Idiots and Imbeciles, for instance, should not be overlooked. Tish nodded agreement but whispered, "Oh, poor dear Flossie."

Sherlock, who was perched on the settee, folding and refolding Watson's message and looking abstracted, suddenly stood up. "I will do everything in my power to find her," he said with an air of authority and finality, bowing slightly and extending one arm towards the door, signaling our client that it was time for her to leave.

But Tish remained in her chair. "I am going nowhere except to assist in the search for my sister."

"Don't be absurd," Sherlock said in that charming way of his. "Rather than gallivanting from bedlam to bedlam, it would be far more efficient to ferret out information at Dunhench, which is what I intend to do."

"Certainly, do so. Meanwhile, I intend to 'gallivant' just as you described." With thinned lips and uplifted chin, Tish faced him.

Sherlock condescended to her as if he were trying to reason with a child. "Have you a brother, an uncle, any respectable man to accompany you?"

"I have no one but Flossie, and Flossie has no one but me."

“All the greater your obligation to safeguard yourself. Have you thought what perils you might encounter, a woman all alone in such places?” His oh-so-sensible tone could not have been more annoying.

“She will not be alone,” I interceded. “I will go with her.”

Sherlock’s manner quite changed as he turned to me, and his glare rather endeared him to me, as did this outburst: “Enola, don’t be a fool!”

My heart warmed to him; I smiled. “It’s rather too late for me to be otherwise, my dear brother.” Standing up, I collected my gloves and parasol, then offered my hand to Tish, who accepted it as she rose to accompany me.

In heightened tones Sherlock appealed, “But what can either of you expect to *do*?”

“We shall see.”

“Thank you for your concern, Mr. Holmes.”

Arm in arm, Tish and I sashayed out of Sherlock’s lodging.

★ ★ ★

At the nearest tea shop, we stopped to partake of that life-sustaining beverage along with a very late luncheon of fish-paste sandwiches, roly-poly pudding, and apple slices to be dipped in honey. Tish addressed me, “Miss Holmes—”

“Please, call me Enola. Or Eudoria, or Hadassah, or Tuppence Ha’penny, or anything you please.” In one of my reckless moods, I spoke on. “You know, Tish, I have become quite fond of you and Flossie, even though I have never met her and I scarcely know you.”

That made her smile a little despite her fears for her missing sister. “I feel honoured by your kind regard, Enola, and so would Flossie, I am sure.” She stopped smiling. “I confess I have not the slightest idea how to gain entry into an insane asylum.”

“Nor do I. We shall ask Watson.”

“Also, I have only a very little money.”

“I have a great deal, almost as much as there is honey on my hands.” By that time I had got myself quite sticky. “Think no more of it. Tell me, Tish, if I may ask, where do you get waistcoats of such lovely hues?”

“I have them especially made for me. It is my one extravagance.” Tish seemed to be having difficulty eating much, although she had progressed to sipping her second cup of tea. “I started dressing this way,” she added in a sombre tone, “to stand apart from my sister. If she could be so effortlessly beautiful, why then, I had to look—different, somehow. But now, under the circumstances, I feel terribly sorry for my pettiness.”

“Not at all. It is only normal that one should wish to be oneself and not someone else. I feel the same way. Before I began to disguise myself as a grown-up, I was quite a shocking creature wearing knickerbockers.”

Tish almost laughed.

“I should like to dress like you,” I added somewhat truthfully, meaning at times, perhaps. Actually, I quite adored the new fashions, for—after decades of crinolines and bustles—verticality had at last come into style, and I was a decidedly vertical creature.

After we had quite finished our tea (and the attendant had brought us basins of cool, lemon-garnished water wherein to wash our fingers), we took a cab to Dr. Watson’s office. He was glad to see me, inquiring anxiously about Sherlock’s condition, and when he heard that it was much improved, he was most solicitous to oblige both me and Tish, professing himself outraged that anyone had dared to forge his signature as a physician. He quite wanted a word with the man who had done that, he assured us. Shortly thereafter, we left with an index of London sanatoriums in our possession and admonitions of caution echoing in our ears. Had the good doctor not been attending a baby with badly corrupted nappy rash that possibly could have turned fatal, I think he would have volunteered to serve as our escort.

By then it was nearly evening, too late in the day for us to start. Also, by then, because of lack of sleep the night before, I was yawning until my jaw ached. Tish and I shook hands on the pavement outside Watson’s office, agreeing to meet the morning of the next day, Saturday.

“On Saturdays I take a half holiday in any event,” she remarked.

“You work at an office, then?”

“Only part-time, nowadays. I prefer to take in typing to do at home. It was a great thing for me when I had saved up enough to purchase my own

typewriter.”

“And make your own unique and very attractive calling cards.”

Thus I left her smiling.

★ ★ ★

In the morning I dressed in a simple blouse, skirt, and jacket, like Tish, although I had neither ascot nor waistcoat to complete the similarity. Nor did I have a bowler hat, so I made do with a plain straw boater. When Tish met me for breakfast, as we had arranged, she took in my costume, smiled only very slightly, and tactfully said nothing.

We were both rather silent and sober that morning, for our day’s undertaking promised to be a grim one. After we had eaten and drunk our tea, we proceeded to Our Lady of Bethlehem, a venerable institution better known as Bedlam, because there, Dr. Watson had told us, on days other than Sunday we could hire a guide and take a tour, looking at the inmates as if they were animals in a zoo.

Our cab stopped at a massive stone-and-brick main building that looked rather like a cross between a factory and a fortress. With its ranked windows, gables, towers, all in strictest symmetry, Bedlam seemed built to negate externally the disordered minds kept within. At the imposing gateposts in the tall wall that surrounded the whole, a guard halted us until we explained our purpose and produced money. He then summoned for us a guide, a buxom woman in a powder-blue nurse’s uniform nearly covered with quite a plain and sturdy white apron. Her cap, however, a frilly affair with tails, seemed to indicate a rank near the top of the hierarchy of attendants, as did her complacent smile.

“Our interest is confined to the female wards,” I told her. “You do separate the asylum populace by gender, do you not?”

“Yes, indeed.” She took us in through the massive front doors, turned left, and after that I do not recall our visit sequentially, but only in snippets, as one might remember a bad dream. Women, so many women, blankly staring, not conversing with one another, yet making noise—moans, cries, whimpers, singsong droning sounds. Some who drooled,

some with green crusts below their noses. Most of them wearing torn dresses that failed to cover them properly, and all of them barefoot.

“They cannot have shoes, poor things, because they are dangerous when thrown. Most of the time they seem to have very little life in them, yet they do fight, especially when one tries to clean them.”

Whether young or not, they all *seemed* old because of their harrowed faces—that and their thin, frazzled hair hanging loose and unkempt. Some of the women in their torn and patched dresses stood like statues looking at nothing, some sat on benches that seemed no more wooden than they, and some lay in the middle of the bare floor, curled up as if for warmth, with no pillows for their heads except their own arms. Whether standing, seated, or lying, many of the women had their hands encased in large, thumbless mittens of padded leather.

“Some of them tear clothes so dreadfully, their own clothes and those of others, that we have to put them in mitts. But we try never to be unkind. There was a time when they would have been kept in chains. You’ll not find that anymore.”

We saw wards ranked with narrow beds, and similar beds lining the hallways.

“Our seemingly quite adequate space is sorely overwhelmed by the staggering numbers of hapless souls who come our way.”

Some women huddled underneath the beds, hiding. One of them, sagging and wrinkled—so shocking, I had to look away quickly—was stark naked.

“Oh, dear.” Our guide rang a bell to summon someone to the ward, then hastened to move us onwards. It may have been then that Tish and I began to hold hands.

We saw women separated from one another behind bars, wearing oddly shapeless, heavy dresses made out of quilted canvas. One declared, “I killed my baby! I killed my baby!” over and over again. Others hissed, or yowled, or shouted insults at Tish and me, whilst some screeched the most dreadful profanities.

“These ones are in a bad way, poor dears. They must be in cells to prevent them from hurting anyone, and wear the strong dresses to keep

them from shredding their clothing and hurting themselves. The strong dresses are kinder than straitjackets. And in cells instead of in chains, at least they can move about."

Certainly they were moving about, some of them leaping against their bars, trying to attack us, like wild animals, and yelling in frenzy. With their hair shorn almost to the skull and their eyes dilated, they seemed scarcely human.

"Their hair is cut short because otherwise they get lice. In order to calm them enough for bathing, we must drug them. But those in the other wards are bathed weekly."

In no particular order that I can remember, we saw a laundry where some of the more trusty inmates worked, and an exercise yard where some wore bloomers and were being instructed to do jumping jacks, and a kitchen full of workers, some of them inmates also.

"The poor souls in this asylum eat better than most of the factory workers in London."

We were shown a hydrotherapy room full of variously equipped bathtubs. And another therapy room bristling with electrogalvanic devices. And a chapel.

"We must keep their Sunday clothes under lock and key so they do not destroy them."

And, I would rather forget, in one ward a number of inmates sitting or lying stock still in restraints. Head restraints, torso restraints, limb restraints.

"For hysterics."

"Hysterics?" Tish murmured.

"When they grow excited, laughing or singing unhealthily or trying to tear their hair or injure themselves, they must be restrained."

"Are there none who are recovering," I begged, "and who might go home again?"

"Yes, indeed. Those who are brought here for puerperal insanity often recover within three months to a year. Those afflicted with moral insanity sometimes rally when encouraged to read the Bible. And those driven out of their minds by overwork, unrequited love, unsympathetic husbands, or

such misfortunes can often be helped by merest kindness. I have saved the most pleasant ward for last. This way." She ushered us into a room neither as bare nor as crowded as the others. About a dozen women who appeared normally dressed, albeit plainly so, occupied shabby armchairs or sat at tables. Some were sewing patches onto clothing, some were knitting or crocheting, and a few were reading. They looked up and smiled when we came in. Our guide introduced them to us by name, and they replied courteously to a few words of conversation.

Tish let go of my hand, pulled a photograph of Flossie out of her reticule and showed it to them. "Have any of you seen my sister?"

They shook their heads most sympathetically, and one Irishwoman offered, "If it's to a place like this she's gone, miss, it's greatly changed you'll find her."

"I could have told you at once that she is not here," complained our guide.

I refrained from retorting that she could have been paid to misinform us, and Tish said simply, "I had to look for her myself. Have we seen all of the women who reside here?"

"Heavens, no. I can't take you to the barn where they milk the cows, or to the infirmary building full of fever, or to the ward for those who won't keep their clothes on, now, can I?"

I took one quick glance at Tish's face and said, "I believe we are finished here, then."

Our guide showed us out of Bedlam in heavily starched silence.

Chapter the Thirteenth

As soon as we achieved the privacy of a closed cab, Tish broke down and wept, curling up like a wilted flower to hide her face in her hands. I sat beside her and gave her a handkerchief, then put my arm around her shoulders, drew her into a hug, and patted her, trying to comfort her although a clotted sensation in my throat prevented me from saying anything helpful. After a short while, she sat up straight, applied the handkerchief to her face, and tried to say, although her voice would not quite obey her, that she was sorry for her weakness.

"Not at all." My own voice sounded as choked as hers. "I quite feel like weeping myself."

"To imagine Flossie … in such a … dreadful place…" Sobs shook her again.

"Shhh." I recommenced my soothing gestures. "We will talk about it when we get home."

By this I meant the Professional Women's Club where I lodged, and I took Tish straight upstairs so that she need not suffer the embarrassment of being seen with red eyes in the sitting room. Once we were safely secluded in my rather Spartan room, I showed her to the washstand so that she could apply cool water to her face, rang for tea, then seated her in my one and only armchair. I myself perched on the wooden chair at my desk, reaching for paper and a pencil.

"One of your lists?" Tish asked, her voice so warm, friendly, almost teasing, that I smiled.

"Yes, one of my lists." I wrote:

TO FIND FLOSSIE

- Visit more asylums? Great pain for small gain. No guarantee we shall see her, as staff probably bribed to conceal her. And it

would take us months to visit them all.

- Send photograph around, inquire at all asylums? Unhelpful. Again, Caddie would have bribed staff to conceal her.

- Would we even recognize her if we found her? How would being in such a place change her?

At this point I dropped the pencil and seized my head in both hands, for a most unruly jumble of new thoughts was rushing in, jostling my brain. "Stars and garters, things I should have asked in the first place!" I exclaimed. "Tish, what ward would Flossie be in?"

"My sister does not belong in *any* ward of—"

"I mean, what sort of excuse would Caddie most likely use to have her committed? Was her behaviour eccentric in any way?"

"Enola, of course not! My sister was—is—an angel!"

I realized I was asking questions of the wrong person, but wrote anyway:

- Hysteria? Any sort of excitement; catch-all.

- Moral insanity? Euphemism for adulterous thoughts or tendencies? Another catch-all for jealous husbands.

- Erotomania if she loved him?

- Frigidity if she did not?

- Hypothesizing that Caddie did the same with his first wife, Myzella, ask her relations whether they know what he committed her for—and where.

Eureka.

I asked Tish, "Are we agreed not to visit any more asylums just yet?"

"Agreed. Anyway, tomorrow is Sunday."

True. Public institutions, such as registrars, libraries, courthouses, and insane asylums, would not be open to the public. But there was no reason why I should not go calling on the Haskells.

★ ★ ★

The next morning, outfitted in my exceedingly genteel teal-coloured traveling costume, I stopped at Baker Street to talk with Sherlock. But he was not there, and had not been since Friday, I was told, so I left word—*Gone to call on the Haskells in St. John's,* with the date—and then caught a train to Surrey. Luckily I was able to bypass Dorking (and its livery stable, and Jezebel), getting off at the next stop, where I had luncheon, then rented a horse, driver, and light carriage for the day. As the driver hitched up, I explained to him that I needed to go calling upon some Haskells in order to complete my family tree. "I hope I can still find some Haskells living in the St. John's area?"

"Yes, indeedy, miss!" A well-upholstered and genial man, he all but split his broad, florid face with his smile. "The Haskells got deep roots in St. John's and ain't no more likely to take up and leave than if they was a coppice of trees. Which one you want to see first?"

I had thought this out. Because I could not ask for Myzella's mother without starting gossip, and because male family members generally inhibit frank conversation, I replied, "I would prefer a single or widowed woman, if possible, perhaps an older one."

"Why, then, I'll take you straight to Dame Haskell herself."

I agreed, and he took me for a pleasant drive across the pretty Surrey countryside—much more pleasant than my jaunt with Jezzie! Peering out of the carriage windows, I saw St. John's to be a picturesque village and my destination—as I was conveyed off of the main road and up a drive—a large, comfortable-looking plaster-and-whitewash farmhouse. "Dame" Haskell's title was honourific, then, and I would not be dealing with people of rank.

With all due courtesy my driver left me at the front door—opening the carriage for me and assisting me out as if I were porcelain and might break—then abandoned me for the sake of chums in the barn or stable. But there

was no need for me to stand knocking at the door; it opened, and a smiling gingham-clad housemaid beckoned me in.

"I am *so* glad you are not a butler," I told her.

Unabashed, she laughed. "No, I'm just Sally, miss. Why don't you walk right on through. You'll find Missus Haskell in the garden." There was no need for her to guide me, for in this forthright old house one followed a straight path from the front door to the back. The scrubbed, country feeling of the kitchen I passed through reminded me of Mrs. Lane's domain in Ferndell Hall, my childhood home, and Dame Haskell, when I found her gathering windfall pears and medlars and apples into a great basket, reminded me a bit of Mrs. Lane herself. Instead of the shriveling invalid I had half expected, I found a robust woman with the wind in her white hair, wearing neither hat nor gloves, her hands stained by juice oozing from the bruised fruit. Greedy for sweets, wasps and honeybees clung to her hands as well as to the fruit. "You'll be stung!" I exclaimed.

"I already was. Some would say it's what I deserve for working on the Sabbath. But I can't believe God will mind, being as these will make such good cider." Setting her basket down, she straightened to have a long and frankly appraising look at me, studying me from my fashionable hat to my polished boots. Rather than embarrass the condition of her hands by offering a card, I smiled and let her look.

She spoke abruptly. "You came all the way out here from the city." This sounded like a statement rather than a question.

"Quite."

"Whatever for? Who are you?"

"My name is Enola Holmes, and I would like to ask you some questions."

"You're not The Right Honourable Miss Enola Holmes?" A gentle gibe at my gentrified appearance.

"No, I'm just plain Enola."

"And why are you asking questions, Just Plain Enola?"

I wished I could answer this doughty countrywoman as directly as she questioned me, but Myzella Haskell's fate was far too delicate a matter to broach straight on. I said, "I am representing the family of Felicity Glover

Rudcliff, second wife of the Earl of Dunhench. He has informed them by letter that she recently passed away and was cremated. Her loved ones suspect otherwise, and thus beg to know what truly happened not only to her, but to his first wife."

Dame Haskell took a long breath, let it out slowly, then without a word she marched to a nearby pump, where she washed her hands and dried them on her apron. Beckoning me to follow, she led the way to a secluded stonework bench at the far end of the garden. Here she sat and, again at her wordless invitation, I sat beside her. But I did not venture to speak; I waited.

Finally Dame Haskell said, "Myzella was my treasure, my pride, my granddaughter. My heart burns for her sake every day of my overlong life."

Her words sounded hard and old, like stones. Undoubtedly she had good reason to be bitter for her granddaughter's sake. I waited; I kept silence; I scarcely ventured to breathe.

She went on in the same stony tone, "We fools, we simple country folk, her mother and father and brothers and cousins and I, we suspected nothing. We did not learn the truth about what had happened to her until it was far … too … late."

With each word she seemed to be finding it harder to speak. I nodded, leaned forward to gaze into her face, and implored her with my hands to go on.

Eventually she got some words out. "How did this lady—What was her name?"

"Felicity."

"That is quite an ironic name for any woman married to Rudcliff." Dame Haskell sounded bitter but in control now. "How does Felicity's family suspect something wrong when we were so blind?"

"She left a cipher. May I tell you what it said?"

"Yes."

"Two words: *insane asylum.*"

"Dear heavens above. How did she know?" Dame Haskell abandoned all dignity and distance; she turned to me earnestly. "Poor woman, she

must have heard whispers of Myzella. Old Dr. Simmons confessed on his deathbed, or we would never have learned."

"Dr. Simmons?"

"Our family doctor here in St. John's. Until he spoke, it seemed the most natural thing in the world to us that Myzella—her heart, always so frail and tender—that she should follow her little Angelica into the grave—although for Myzella there was no grave, just that devilish cremation. Still, clod-witted farmers that we are, we suspected nothing, but Dr. Simmons knew all, and for nearly a decade it had weighed heavy on his conscience that he had let Lord Cadogan bribe and bully him until he signed the paper to have our sweet girl committed on account of nervous excitement."

Another term for hysteria.

"Committed *where*?" I spoke more vehemently than I should have; this could be the key to finding Flossie!

But old Mrs. Haskell smiled ruefully, understanding my eagerness as well as if I had spoken my thought aloud. "A wretched, unhealthy place along the Thames, Miss Enola. We arrived to find Myzella in the throes of mortal illness, only just in time to comfort her as she perished, God rest her sweet, so sorely wronged soul. And then—there was nothing we could do about the Earl of Dunhench, but we could and did set about having this so-called asylum condemned. It has been torn down and demolished; it no longer exists."

Chapter the Fourteenth

Dame Haskell and I sat on the bench at the bottom of her garden and talked a good while longer. She told me that her son, Myzella's father, lived in another farmhouse nearby, but I did not feel I could learn anything more by calling upon him and his wife, nor did I wish to open their wounds afresh. I concluded my visit and came away with greatest sympathy for all the Haskells, but not much the wiser as regarded Flossie.

What was I to tell Tish? No plan of action, except the unsatisfactory one of trekking from asylum to asylum in search of Flossie, came to mind. Once in my hired carriage, I sat staring at the Surrey countryside without the slightest appreciation of its loveliness, and once upon the train back to London, I watched the telegraph poles fly past my window in exactly the same way. As the train slowed to pull into the Dorking Station, I gazed unseeing at the people on the platform—

One of whom was Sherlock Holmes.

Not even disguised. He wore his country tweeds and his deerstalker hat.

At first, in my daze of gloom, I felt only the faintest niggling of recognition, and then I blinked, sensing that he was someone familiar, and then I gasped and shot up as if a pin had stuck me, running out of my compartment. Just as the train screeched and wheezed to a stop, I reached a doorway, shoved past the conductor stationed there, and—not wishing to call my brother's famous name aloud—I put thumb and forefinger to my mouth and blasted quite a clear, loud whistle.

He turned; I waved; he saw me. So, of course, did everyone else, the expressions on their faces exhibiting how aghast they were that a female quite properly clad in a teal traveling costume with matching hat should behave in such an unladylike manner. So much the worse for them. I grinned as Sherlock headed towards me, carrying a valise and, if I read his face aright, trying not to smile.

“What have you been up to now, Enola?” he asked with a mock scowl once we had achieved the privacy of our compartment.

I retorted, “I might well ask you the same thing.”

“Indeed.” Now he looked quizzical and—it took me a moment to identify an expression I had never previously seen on his face—yes, Sherlock looked sheepish. “But there’s little enough to report.”

“Please do report what little there is.”

“Let me first light my pipe.” Once this was done, and once he had emitted a cloud of smoke no more noxious than usual, he leaned back in his seat and commenced his narration. “I traveled out here Friday evening, and yesterday, in the guise of a reasonably sober Irishman, I applied for a station as a groom at the Dunhench stables, but I was turned down. I loitered to gossip but learned nothing concerning our client’s sister. I invited myself to take tea in the servant’s hall, chatting up the women, but they gave nothing away except by the rigidity of their postures and the tightness of their faces; they know something but are frightened of it.”

“So you made no progress.”

“Wait a moment. It gets worse. I took my leave on foot, doubled back to hide in the woods, and found a leafy dingle in which to doze until late at night when all the lights in Dunhench Hall had gone out. I then burgled the place. I need not bore you with details; suffice it to say that should I ever require another career, I would make an excellent burglar. I quickly penetrated the library and opened the safe I found hidden behind a large but unlovely oil painting of an ancestral Rudcliff. I riffled both the safe and the desk thoroughly in search of any suggestive leaf or scrap of paper, anything to reveal the whereabouts of the putative asylum to which Lady Felicity was committed, or the pseudonym under which it might have been done, but I found nothing. Not the slightest indication.”

“Finding nothing does not prove there is nothing to find.”

“I found rather less than nothing. Having failed in the library, I stole upstairs and into Lord Cadogan’s suite of rooms, their location having been revealed to me in the course of my conversation with his servants. There, with greatest stealth, I attempted to examine by rushlight the papers

on his dresser top and bedside table. However, he awoke, and I was obliged to flee."

"Sherlock! Did he see you?"

"He saw no more than something that went bump in the night, nor did anyone else, although I must say the man has an excellent pair of lungs. However, a brave lad sped off on horseback to alert the constabulary, who are scouring the countryside for suspicious persons. I thought it wise to take early leave of Threefinches, so here I am. And now, Enola, your report?"

Trying to think how best to begin, I quipped, "Might I borrow your pipe?"

"Nonsense, Enola." But he could not quite keep the corners of his mouth from twitching upwards.

"Well, Tish and I visited Bedlam, and returned much shaken in our emotions *and* our plans, for we learned it was quite possible, in any given asylum, for Flossie to be in residence without our ever seeing her."

"There were some wards to which you were not admitted."

"Exactly. Also, wherever Lord Cadogan has committed Flossie, surely he is paying well to have her concealed."

"Have you gained any insight as to why he might have dealt with her so?"

"Wait a minute. Today I visited St. John's to talk with the Haskells. Because the local doctor confessed on his deathbed, we now know conclusively that darling Caddie's first wife, Myzella, was indeed committed to an insane asylum, where—"

Sherlock interrupted with what for him must be called considerable excitement. "*Which* asylum?"

"It doesn't matter. The Haskells had it closed down as a pesthole; Myzella among many others had succumbed there to Thames River damps. Apparently Lord Cadogan then felt free to marry again."

"And once again to marry below his station in life." Sherlock bit on his pipe stem and puffed hard, frowning—most likely because he found it distasteful to talk with a female, me, about such a sensitive topic as matrimonial union. "Enola, has it occurred to you to wonder why he wed

Flossie Glover, no matter how pretty and talented she was, when he could have had…" Apparently overcome with delicacy, he failed to complete the sentence.

I endeavored to complete it for him. "When he could have had any available woman from scullery maid to maid of honour. I would respond that he is the sort of man who considers women fungible."

His eyebrows shot up. "I beg your pardon?"

"Fungible. Interchangeable, one much the same as another, like cattle or clothespins or checkers on a board. Our mother taught me the word to describe a certain kind of womanizer."

"My dear sister!" My candor shocked him.

"Dear brother, you know it's true. I daresay the reason Lord Cadogan did not marry a titled woman was that a woman of rank, with a powerful family, would have been much more difficult to discard when he tired of her."

"Then why marry at all?"

"For the sake of an heir, most likely. But for some reason he quickly tired of Flossie. I imagine she was rather too decent a person for him."

Sherlock puffed his pipe in silence for some time, and continued to hold it in his teeth even after it went out. I watched the view from the window —we had reached the wretched Southwark slums of London—but I saw only the disturbing images in my mind. A beautiful woman barefoot, her clothing clawed to rags, her hair half pulled out by the denizens of a madhouse. And the cad of a so-called gentleman who had put her there, who had cast her off like a rag. Lord Rudcliff riding his high horse to hounds. Lord Rudcliff in an expensive smoking jacket, smiling over his wine. Lord Rudcliff ogling the servant girl who brought him his nightcap.

As we pulled into Victoria Station, my brother blinked, roused, and pocketed his pipe. "What are we to tell our client?" he asked me. "That we have exhausted all avenues of inquiry?"

"There must be something we can do about that cad!" My vehemence and volume surprised me; I gentled my tone. "I must think, Sherlock. And I must do so without the assistance of shag tobacco."

★ ★ ★

I knew myself to be tall, like my brother, and dolichocephalic, like my brother, and regrettably similar to him in profile, which is to say, proboscis. But I also knew myself to be quite unlike him in many ways even aside from being female. Dr. Watson's accounts of my brother portrayed him as forgetting to eat when he was at his most brilliant. I, however, never forget to eat, and I believe a good meal being well digested is as significant an aid to the brain as it is to any other portion of my personage.

So, upon returning to the Professional Women's Club, I dined well on saddle of mutton with mint sauce and parsley, hot potato crisps, apple dumplings, and rice pudding. Afterwards, alone in my room, I seated myself at my desk and brought out pencil and paper as unconsciously as many women take up their knitting. (My mother saw to it that I was not taught to knit, crochet, embroider, or play the piano; she wanted to make quite sure that I would never become domestic or decorative.) Idly, as if of its own accord, rather like the pointer on a Ouija board, my hand started sketching, producing a nastily leering caricature of Lord Cadogan Burr Rudcliff II's ever-so-handsome face.

Warming to that subject, I drew him sticking out his tongue, then falling off a horse with posterior in the air, then with his coattails flapping as he ran after a fleeing woman, who metamorphosed as I drew her from a scullery maid to someone more like the women I had seen at Bedlam. Setting Caddie aside, I found myself drawing picture after picture of them, the so-called madwomen: barefoot, ragged, abject, slumped on benches, curled like rubbish on the floor. One of them was Flossie. Although I had never met her, I had seen her photograph and her twin sister, Tish. Filling paper after paper, I drew Flossie, thin and haggard, dressed in a heavy quilted canvas strong dress, then Flossie in rags with her long hair in a dreadful tangle hanging down, then Flossie quite lovely in an evening gown, and then Flossie in a magnificent new hat and a jacket with stylishly puffed shoulders. Opposite her I drew Tish, very smart and rather daring in a bowler, a waistcoat, a high collar, and a flowing ascot.

Usually something helpful would float up from the more obscure recesses of my mind when I went on a sketching jag like this. But I knew better than to *think* about it. I drew Flossie again, on quite a spirited horse in a riding habit, and then Tish—but I had only just sketched in her face when something quite unusual happened.

Someone knocked on my door.

Papers scattered all over the floor as I arose and hurried over, calling, "Who is it?"

"Tish."

"Tish!" I opened the door wide, welcoming her in, so delighted to have a visitor that I forgot I had no good news for her.

She stepped into my room, saw my sketches strewn across the coconut-fiber matting at my feet, and exclaimed "You drew these? They are wonderful! Don't step on them!" She crouched and started picking them up, taking a close look at each one. "I see that your opinion of Lord Cadogan agrees with mine … Oh! You drew *me*!"

"That's not you," I said, trying to tease a smile out of her. "That's Flossie dressed like you."

"Of course. That's why you made me pretty."

Hearing a shadow in her whimsy, I protested, "Tish, you *are* pretty." Sitting down on the floor beside her, I picked up another drawing, the one in which I had memorialized the wine-red evening gown, and joked, "This is you dressed up as Flossie."

But as I spoke, as I heard my own words, something splashed and bubbled deep in my mind. I sat with my mouth open.

Nor had Tish smiled, only reached for a sketch of a barefoot woman in rags. In a pained tone she said, "This may be what Flossie looks like now."

"Oh," I whispered, my eyes widening like the ripples of my thoughts. "Oh, my blessed stars."

Chapter the Fifteenth

Tish and I talked for hours that night. I gave her a full report of all the efforts made by Sherlock, and by me, to find out exactly what had happened to Flossie. I told her about conversing with Sherlock on the train that afternoon, and his questioning whether we had exhausted all avenues of inquiry. And then I confided in her that there was a plan beginning to sketch itself in my mind, only a few lines of which were at this point plain to me, but she could help me work it out if she would be so kind. Taking my time, I explained as best I could. She was at first incredulous. Later, as I convinced her that I earnestly believed in the scheme I had begun to form, Tish was terrified, dreadfully frightened, yet at the same time courageously willing to try.

By the time midnight neared, it had become obvious that neither of us would sleep that night, so I persuaded Tish to let me do her hair in an elaborate coif, after which I crowned her with one of my most elegant hats, applied a hint of rouge to her lips and cheeks, and covered her mannish costume with a flowing, fur-trimmed polonaise. I loaned her my best kid gloves, then gave her a dainty, lace-edged handkerchief and instructed her how to dangle it between thumb and forefinger by its middle, for a lady must always carry something in one hand. Then off we went, as all the clocks of London were striking the witching hour, to call on Sherlock.

According to Dr. Watson’s accounts, the great Sherlock Holmes hardly ever slept, being wont to research, ponder, or do chemical experiments all night. However, that night no light showed in his windows or Mrs. Hudson’s, either. For several reasons, including the effort Tish and I had expended to dress her up for the occasion, I felt unwilling to retreat. I both pounded on the door and rang the bell, knocking up Mrs. Hudson and, in due course, my brother.

Yawning, he came out of his bedroom in a dressing gown and carpet slippers, blinked at Tish, arched his brows and inquired, “Lady Felicity?”

“You see, Tish?” I told her, trying not to gloat. “You can carry it off.”

Sherlock said, “Tish?” then corrected himself, “Miss Glover, please be seated,” then said to me, “She can carry off what?”

“Impersonating her sister.”

“Evidently. But why is it necessary to demonstrate this in the middle of the night?”

“Because I do not think she will allow me to dress her up like a doll ever again.”

“Quite right,” said Tish from her chair. “Nor will it be necessary. I’ll gladly exchange this monstrous hat for bare feet and a ragged dress.”

Sherlock’s eyebrows levitated yet higher, and he pleated his long personage to sit upon his settee. Then his brows descended as he eyed me, hawklike. “Enola, are you concocting one of your bizarre schemes?”

“The most bizarre ever,” I acknowledged. Then I sat down and told him about it.

★ ★ ★

“Risky,” Sherlock said half an hour later, puffing on his pipe as I had seldom seen him puff before. “Very risky, and it will all be up to you, Miss Glover.”

She raised doubtful eyes to him. “Do you really think I can do it?”

“You must, for this harebrained venture may be our only hope of finding your sister. I admit I have no better option to offer.”

“You think we should try, then.”

“Yes, and we must plan the exploit down to the last detail. We will need beeswax, soap, vinegar, petroleum jelly, rice powder, greasepaint—and what about your hair? Is it exactly the same colour as your sister’s?”

“No. She, um, enhances hers with lemon juice,” said Tish, blushing at her own candor. After hesitating, she added, “Nor do I think any amount of tangling will achieve the proper effect. I think—I think it would be best if we cut it all off.”

“My dear young lady!” Sherlock protested, aghast.

“Tish can borrow my wigs until it grows out again,” I told him in my most soothing tone. *Men,* I thought, *so excitable about trifles.*

Tish added, “The effect will be so horrifying that he will scarcely notice what I say or do, in case I lose my nerve.”

“A good point. But you fairly make my head spin, you two.” Sherlock glanced at the Persian slipper on his mantelpiece as if he were thinking of refilling his pipe, shook his head, then turned to us with a decided gesture. “It is very late. Let us convene again tomorrow morning. I have several affairs of moment in hand,” added Sherlock, “including quite a delicate matter involving a gold mine in the Andes and a recent chupacabra attack on the British ambassador to Chile, but I admit that even that little puzzle does not exhibit the features of novelty and ingenuity promised by the singular adventure of Dunhench Hall. Young ladies, you can count on my presence and support.”

★ ★ ★

By morning, I had slept a little, my excitement of mind had calmed somewhat, and I realized more soberly the danger into which I proposed to send Tish for Flossie’s sake. In order to protect Tish, we would have to plan as if organizing a military sally into enemy territory.

Sherlock, I am sure, realized the same, for when I arrived at his lodging I found him setting up a large chalkboard and arranging chairs to face it. Then, to my pleasant surprise, in came Dr. Watson. As I greeted him and gave him a cup of tea, I remarked to Sherlock, “You have called in reinforcements.”

“Indeed, and I wish we had more. Ah, good morning, Miss Glover,” he said as she entered. He introduced her. “Miss Letitia Glover, my friend and associate Dr. Watson.”

“We met once before, briefly.” Just the same, always the gentleman, Watson stood up and bowed, very nearly spilling his tea.

Tish asked Sherlock, “Does he know?”

“He knows only that we need to free your sister, who happens to be your twin, from a lunatic asylum, the location of which is yet to be determined.”

“And,” said Watson, “I appreciate the chance for revenge upon the man who forged my signature on an official document.”

“Hear, hear,” said Sherlock.

I told Dr. Watson, “Simply put, the plan is that Miss Glover, disguised as her sister with a torn dress, bare feet, and harrowed face, should confront her brother-in-law so as to make him believe his wife has escaped. Our hope is that he will then reveal the location of the lunatic asylum by ordering her to be taken back there.”

Dr. Watson commented only with lifted eyebrows and a low whistle.

“Exactly,” said Sherlock. “We must organize every stage of this rather risky undertaking.” He began to write on the blackboard, and like obedient schoolchildren we all took our seats. In blocky chalk letters Sherlock wrote:

ESTABLISH HEADQUARTERS NEAR DUNHENCH

GET MISS LETITIA GLOVER INTO DUNHENCH HALL UNDER OUR SECRET GUARD

WHEN SHE IS FORCED INTO CARRIAGE, ACCOMPANY AND/OR FOLLOW

IF NAME OF ASYLUM KNOWN, STOP CARRIAGE. IF DESTINATION UNKNOWN, FOLLOW WITHOUT FAIL

IN EITHER CASE, WATSON MUST USE HIS M.D. AUTHORITY TO FREE LADY FELICITY

Dense but docile, as always, Watson inquired, “Lady Felicity?”

“Felicity Glover Rudcliff, Countess of Dunhench, our client’s twin sister and the unhappy wife of Cadogan Burr Rudcliff the Second, Earl of Dunhench in Surrey.”

“Oh.”

“Now, how are we all to get there? We cannot approach by way of Threefinches. Enola and I would be recognized there, and excite too much talk.”

“We could travel by train to Woking, then rent a drag to approach from the opposite direction, across country,” Watson said. “Perhaps we should hire a vacant cottage near Dunhench Hall, if one is to be found.”

Sherlock concurred. “An excellent idea. As I am known in those parts, would you kindly go there at your earliest convenience, Watson, and call upon land agents?”

“I will go today.”

“And Tish and I will visit used clothing stores in order to costume her,” I volunteered.

Sherlock said, “Once we arrive at our mutual destination, I will help you render her quite ghastly, Enola, with a few tricks from the world of the theatre.”

Tish asked in a small voice, “But how am I to get into Dunhench Hall?”

“Ah. There, indeed, is the rub. We must go after dark, on an evening when the charming earl is either dining or sitting alone, and I suppose we must either bribe the lodge-keeper or cosh him. I dare say you can handle things once we get you past the gates?”

“I think I can fool the butler and Caddie.” Her small voice enlarged slightly. “I look like Flossie and I can act like Flossie when she is angry and I can say what she would say. Heaven knows I have seen her in tempers enough.”

“Good.” Sherlock’s mouth twitched at the corners.

“And the worst Caddie is likely to do to me is slap me.” She did not sound as if she much looked forward to Caddie or to being slapped.

“One or more of us will be right outside to defend you. But assuming there is no need for us to intervene, after you are thrown out of Dunhench Hall, what then? We must assume they will put you in an enclosed carriage. I hope Enola will be able to slip in and hide under the seat when they bring it around for you. Watson and I must follow. But how? We need to have a gig or something of the sort hidden and waiting just outside the gate, which means we need another man, someone to hold the horse and keep an eye on the lodge-keeper. Someone we can trust.”

Silence.

“Miss Glover, are you sure you have no suitable male relatives?”

“I’m quite sure.”

“Watson? Have you anyone to suggest?”

He did not look as if he did. But with the vibrant sensation of a brilliant idea warming my mind, I spoke; indeed, I nearly shouted. “I know who would love to help. Tewky!”

Chapter the Sixteenth

That was on Monday, but it took us until Friday to put everything together.

We each had tasks. I posted a preliminary letter to Tewky. Watson took three days to find and secure the best possible vacant cottage for our purposes. Tish and I drew and reviewed floor plans for Dunhench Hall. Sherlock planned everything on paper, made numerous lists, and procured detailed maps of Surrey and the surrounding areas. Tish and I ventured into the slums of London's East End to search used clothing shops for a suitably appalling dress, plus a complete mourning outfit (my idea) to hide her from curious eyes whilst traveling. And on a day when Tish had to work, Sherlock and I took the train to Belvidere to see Viscount Tewkesbury, Marquess of Basilwether. I protested that I could go by myself, but Sherlock said he needed to witness this transaction if he were to believe it. "A nobleman's son and heir, driving a gig at midnight for the sake of one of your mad schemes, Enola?" he grumbled as we walked up the drive to Basilwether Hall. "Ludicrous."

I retorted, "Can you name me any other able-bodied, intelligent young man within our circle of acquaintance who is so blithely unemployed and free to assist us?"

He replied only with a snort before a youthful voice shouted, "Halloo!" and Tewky appeared hatless but otherwise impeccable in a shooting jacket and fawn-coloured breeches, vaulting over a balustrade to greet us. "Hello, Mr. Holmes who brought me home!" Heartily he shook Sherlock's hand. "It is wonderful to see you again. Hello, Enola!" Arms flung wide open, he threatened to give me a brotherly bear hug.

I stepped back, smiling, but spoke seriously. "Tewky, do please settle down and pay attention. It turns out that 'black barouche' symbolizes the sort of vehicle body snatchers employ when they carry people off to a lunatic asylum. We need your help."

He sobered at once. “Anything I can do for either of you—”

“It’s both of us,” Sherlock interrupted, “and you’d better hear about it before you make any promises. Let us take a walk, shall we?”

Tewky had been raised in a house full of servants who, of course, eavesdropped; he understood at once. He took us for a ramble between the gardens and the woods while Sherlock and I explained the circumstances to him. His response could not have been more satisfactory. “All you want me to do is take the train to Dorking, hire a fast horse and a wagonette, meet you near Dunhench Hall, and assist you as necessary? Of course I will do it. Might I be allowed to punch Lord Cadogan in the nose?”

“Only if I punch him first,” said Sherlock, sounding as dry as a gourmand’s oldest wine. “And depending, of course, whether the duke and duchess will assent to your taking part in this harebrained enterprise.”

“It’s not harebrained at all. It’s brilliant,” said Tewky, very much to my gratification. “And of course my parents will be honoured to let me help you, in preparation for my career as a coachman, as driving is the only thing I’m the least bit good at.”

He meant to make us laugh, and he did. But a few moments later, inside Basilwether Hall, speaking with his parents in our presence, he was quite serious. “This is a chance for me to repay, in some small measure, my debt to Miss Holmes.”

“And of course, it is also a chance to have an adventure,” added the duchess with a wry look on her distinguished face. Nevertheless, she and the duke assented to their son’s participation in the scheme, I think largely because of the grave authority of Sherlock Holmes.

“We will all be depending on you,” Sherlock admonished as he handed handwritten instructions and a hand-drawn map to Marquess Tewkesbury Viscount of Basilwether.

★ ★ ★

I think Tish ate very little during that week of preparation. Indeed, she had eaten little since receiving news of the “passing away” of her sister, and she had slept badly, so she had grown gaunt and pallid. From Sherlock’s point of view, this boded well for her success in passing herself off as the

unfortunate Flossie. I, however, worried about her. On the morning of The Appointed Day I took it upon myself to invite her to breakfast with me in a private room at my club—an excellent breakfast, including ham, fish, *and* tongue along with hot rolls and sweet biscuits—and I exhorted her to eat well, but to no avail. She swallowed only a few mouthfuls.

"Tish, you must bolster your strength! What will happen to Flossie if you become too weak to play your role?"

Her smile looked tired. "Stop fussing, Enola. You're not my mother."

The shock of such a notion, that I could resemble anyone's mother, hushed me for the time being, until we adjourned to my room to prepare for travel. Because we desired to attract no attention, regretfully I made myself as inconspicuous as possible in a tan serge suit and my plainest hat over hair knotted into a severe bun. As for Tish, her widow's weeds completely concealed her from head to toe, even her face being hidden by the thick black veil fastened to the brim of her stiff black hat. "Heavens, I can barely see where I'm going," she murmured, clinging to my arm as we made our way downstairs and out to our awaiting cab, into which our bags, along with a picnic hamper, had already been loaded.

Sherlock and Watson met us at the train station, and for once, my brother wore neither his deerstalker nor his top hat. Although not exactly in disguise, he did manage to blend into the populace in brown trousers bagged at the knee from wear, a slightly frayed jacket, and an old homburg. As for Watson, there was no need for him to modify his appearance in any way; he was, and always had been, deceptively undistinguished.

Meeting on the platform, seeing to our luggage, boarding the train, and even in the privacy of our compartment, we took care to speak quietly, seldom, and only of commonplaces, such as what a nice warm day it was, summery in September, and, as the train progressed out of London, how lovely was the countryside. Tish kept her veil down and barely spoke; the conductor might have thought she was a young widow sunken in grief. Sherlock read the newspapers. Watson and I, seated diagonally across from each other, chitchatted on occasion for appearance's sake.

We traveled to Woking, and got off at a station unfamiliar to me but not, evidently, to Sherlock. Hailing a porter to help with our luggage, he led us to where our transportation awaited us. The “drag” turned out to be a capacious vehicle drawn by no less than four horses, basically a large vehicle too plain to be called a carriage, a vehicle with no cloaked and cockaded coachman; a plain country fellow drove us. No shining harness or bearing reins on the decidedly commonplace horses. No filigree and no very plush upholstery, either. Once we were rumbling along and the driver could not hear us, I felt free to say, “We are roughing it.”

“To simulate being a party of small means and no consequence,” said Holmes.

“Wait until you see the cottage,” added Watson with a smile as mischievous as a boy’s.

From behind her veil, Tish spoke up suddenly, her tone distressed. “What if, after all this, Caddie isn’t *home*?”

Asperity tightened Sherlock’s face, but before he could say anything too cutting, Watson spoke. “I am sure Mr. Holmes has his sources of information, Miss Glover.”

“Quite true,” Sherlock affirmed with a reasonable degree of patience. “Lord Rudcliff remains in residence in Dunhench Hall, and he has no houseguests.”

Our conveyance bucked and slewed along the rutted country roads. Evidently it lacked any sort of springs or suspension. To talk was to risk involuntarily biting the end of one’s tongue off. We were silent.

The train trip from London seemed a mere whisk compared to the interminable journey in the drag along unimproved byways, and all four horses were evidently quite necessary to “drag” such a load across such terrain. Several times, I reminded myself rather sternly that this method of approaching Dunhench Hall was necessary in order to keep our arrival secret.

Finally, Watson got to his feet, stuck his head out a window and shouted to the driver, who bellowed back. Then, after several moments of such back-and-forthing as we found our way between tall hedges lining twisty lanes, we halted in front of our “headquarters.”

The cottage was everything Watson had promised it to be, which is to say it was not much. Patches of plaster had fallen from the outer walls, baring the fieldstone beneath. Its low roof made its two windows and door-for-a-nose resemble a glowering Neanderthal. The two-room interior, furnished with nothing but a stove, a table, and a few chairs, looked not much more attractive—but I did not care, for I was hungry. At once I unpacked our cold and rather late luncheon from its hamper. To my surprise and annoyance, no one else except me seemed very interested in the deviled eggs, baked bean sandwiches, crackers and sardines, et cetera.

Staring out of the cottage's back window, Sherlock waved away my offer of cold Welsh rarebit. "Unless I am much mistaken, one can actually see Dunhench Hall from here."

"Correct. We are situated directly behind its grounds." Coming indoors after having seen to the luggage and dismissed the drag, Watson also gestured refusal when I thrust a sandwich towards him. "Holmes, I have a thought. If we can find or make a way to walk in from here, then we shall not have to deal with the lodge-keeper."

"Splendid!" exclaimed my brother, and the pair of them seized sticks and sallied forth, to be seen no more before dark.

Sighing, I laid aside the Swiss cheese I was devouring, stood up, and went over to Tish, who remained standing in the middle of the room like a black-draped lamppost. I lifted the heavy veil and peered under it as if discovering her face in a cave. She looked ghastly pale amidst all that black. "Come out, come out, wherever you are," I quipped, pulling hatpins so that I could lift away the shroud of black that enveloped her head. After it was gone she stood blinking, as if the dim light of the cottage dazzled her. I took her by the hand and led her to the table. "Come and sit with me and eat something, Tish."

She sat, but she said, "I can't eat."

"Truly? Try a few crackers, at least." I opened the can of sardines.

"I can't. I'll be sick."

Munching sardines and crackers, I asked, "Why? What frightens you? His caddish Lordship?"

“Yes. But even more…” She gulped, looked down, looked up at me, and I could see she spoke with great difficulty. “Even more, the prospect of the lunatic asylum itself. Being taken there and—and put away.”

“Tish, Dr. Watson and my brother will not let you be locked up! You will only lead the way so that we can rescue your sister. Will it not be wonderful to free Flossie?”

“If she is all right. But if—if she has become like the others…”

Beginning to comprehend the breadth and depth of her fears, I lost my own appetite, setting sardines and crackers aside. “I must admit I’ve given very little thought to the aftermath,” I said softly. Where would Flossie go, where would she stay, if not with her sister? And what if Flossie had become a bit mad in the madhouse? How was Tish to take care of her and make a living at the same time?

I took a deep breath. “Tish, let me say two things. One: I will always help you. And two: sometimes it is best to deal with one problem at a time.” Resolutely I stood up to take her into the other room. “Right now, you and I have a great deal of work to do.”

Chapter the Seventeenth

“Let’s cut my hair first,” Tish said.

Get the worst thing over with, I thought. I said nothing, but neither did I begin to hack heartlessly at her hair. Freeing her long locks from where they had been pinned up behind her ears, I combed them down over her back, then braided them into a tight, thick plait perhaps half a metre long, tying it not only at the bottom, but at the top as well. Then I took scissors to her hair above the plait and cut it off. I laid it in her lap. She placed one hand atop it, accepting it, but did not speak or look up.

Cropping off what remained of her hair close to her head, I watched for tears, but saw none. Finally I asked, “How are you?”

“I feel quite literally light-headed. And it’s cold. I believe my scalp is getting goose bumps.”

I laughed in relief that she had some spirit back, fastened a shawl into a sort of turban around her head for warmth, and prepared to work on the rest of her. Because he knew she would not welcome his personal assistance, Sherlock had given me detailed instructions. “Change your clothes,” I told her, “and we shall uglify the skin of your limbs and shoulders.”

“How exciting.”

“Call me when you are ready.” I went into the other room, where the stove was.

During my solitary luncheon I had managed to light the stove using kindling and sticks we had brought with us in the drag. My brother had foreseen and provided for every contingency, including water, which we had carried in kegs, and basins and such. Testing the pot of water I had put on the stove, I found it to be passably warm. While I waited, I leaned my arms on the sill of the rear window and stared at the grim peaked towers of Dunhench Hall silhouetted against the sky.

“Ready!” called Tish.

I hauled the pot of water into the other room where Tish was, then set it down while I admired her. In the stained and grimy secondhand unmentionables we had bought for her, and a faded, tattered dress that failed to quite conceal them, she looked quite shocking already.

“You deserve a medal,” I told her. “An investiture from the queen.”

“Why?”

“You’re brave, Tish.” I hugged her, had her sit down, then took a bar of homemade brown lye soap, dipped it in the water and began to lather her exposed limbs with it.

“The Most Honourable Order of the Bath?” Tish joked.

“If only it were that simple. You must let that soap scum dry upon you. Meanwhile, we must see to your hands.”

“What about them?”

“Did Flossie clip her fingernails the way you do?”

“No, not being a typist, she grew them longer … oh, dear.”

“Not to worry. I have the solution right here.” I set to work with a goodly supply of dried pistachio shells Sherlock had provided, fitting them exactly upon her nail beds, fixing them there with rubber cement and then snipping the ends a bit raggedly. As Tish watched, her eyes opened wide. “How remarkable!”

If by “remarkable” she meant that her fingernails now looked overgrown, splitting and dirty, she was quite correct.

“Now your toes, as you must go barefoot.”

First, however, I collected an interesting selection of grime from the stove, the window ledges, and the doorstep. Down on my knees, I rubbed this mixture of soot, dust, and dirt upon her feet to make them appear as if they had gone days without washing.

“Didn’t people do something like this in the Bible?” asked Tish with exaggerated innocence.

“Quite the opposite, I think.”

“So you are not going to wipe my feet with your hair?”

Her tone was so droll it made me laugh. “Tish, you are being outrageous!”

“Exactly. Did you say you are going to glue pistachio nut shells onto my toenails?”

“Yes.” And by the time I had done so, the soap scum had completely dried upon her limbs, making her skin look rough, neglected, and singularly repulsive, almost as if she might be a leper. For a moment I stood arms akimbo, looking her over much as a cook might survey a successful soufflé.

“I feel crusty,” Tish said, not complaining at all; in fact, she sounded wryly amused.

“Yes, but I think you are not terribly durable. You must be careful not to brush against anything and spoil your delicate patina.” I cocked my head in admiration. “I almost hate to tamper with near perfection,” I murmured.

“But you will.”

“Of course.”

“What comes next?”

“Vinegar.” I brought the bottle from the other room and poured a small amount of the pungent white liquid into a dish, then wet my fingers in it and flicked a few drops of it onto Tish. “I mustn’t use too much, or Caddie might notice you smell like a pickle factory—oh, look!”

Where the drops of vinegar had landed on Tish, her “skin” had blistered to resemble boils or running sores. Tish looked, gasped, and said, “Jolly good! Sprinkle me some more!”

I did so, reminding myself of what Mum had taught me: a true artist must know when to stop. Then, leaving Tish to dry, immobile in her chair as if she were a watercolour on an easel, I went into the other room to melt some beeswax on the stove. Now that my assigned work was mostly done, suddenly the day seemed to be darkening and the bare little cottage felt lonesome. I wished Sherlock and Watson would come back from their walk, or Tewky would drive in.

Where *was* His Tewkiness? He should have been here by now.

“Don’t fuss,” I muttered to myself.

But winds of worry and conjecture began to blow in my mind, setting it to skirling like a bagpipe. Had Tewky somehow gotten lost? Sherlock had given him excellent directions and a detailed map, but still, had he

somehow missed his way? Had he overslept, taken a later train, missed his stop? No, I knew better; he was not so stupid, and my droning, discordant thoughts rose to wail: Some accident must have befallen him, some calamity! What if he were lying, bloody and broken, in a ditch?

I heard someone at the front door, my heart seized upon hope, and I turned so quickly that my skirt whirled. But it was only Sherlock and Watson returning from their explorations.

“We found a way in through the back!” Watson told me with his characteristic boyish excitement.

“Where is Marquess Tewkesbury?” demanded Sherlock.

“Hello to you, too,” I said.

“Enola,” Sherlock insisted, “what has become of your young friend? This venture cannot go forward without him.”

“Why did he not travel with us by way of Woking?” Watson asked.

“Because a drag and a wagonette caravanning in tandem would have been far too noticeable. Or so I thought. Hang everything, Enola, where *is* he?”

“What makes you think I am clairvoyant, brother mine?” I tried not to sound nearly as concerned as I was. “I hope he will be here by the time you finish rendering Tish a horror to behold.”

“How are we doing with Miss Glover?”

“Go look.”

He did so, walking into the other room. Following, I heard him utter “Aha!” with satisfactory fervor. “You look ravishing, Miss Glover, by the most literal definition of the word.” He went over to her and removed the shawl I had wrapped around her head, lifting it off with a flourish as if unveiling a work of art, then stepping back to admire. “Miss Glover, the sacrifice of your hair … I salute you. The sepulchral effect could not be more salubrious for our purposes. Would you permit me a few finishing touches in the vicinity of your face?”

With a wan smile she nodded.

I watched with such fascination as to send chills down my spine as he traced most carefully around her eyes with a stick of charcoal, then applied rice powder to whiten her pallor, then rubbed a variety of grey

grease-paints under her cheekbones and jaw, along the sides of her nose, and gently across her eyelids and around her eyes until their orbits filled with shadow like the sockets of a skull. With another stick of greasepaint, he whitened her already pale lips. He smoothed a ghastly sheen of petroleum jelly across her brow and down her nose. Then he rubbed both grease and charcoal into what little was left of her hair until it lost any appearance of freshness or life; it either bristled like a scrub brush or else clung to her scalp. Finally, he applied under her nose, along her lower eyelids, and around her mouth the beeswax I had melted and cooled, shaping it with his fingertips until it assumed a most unsightly appearance of dried mucus.

As he stood up and back to study his handiwork, spontaneously I applauded. “Bravo! Sherlock, I salute you. Tish, you look mad enough to frighten *me*. Would you like to see?” I flourished a hand mirror.

She hesitated before whispering, “Very well.”

Approaching, I held up the mirror so that she could see her face in it. She gasped, flinching away from her own reflection.

“Tish?”

“Do … do we…” She seemed shocked almost beyond speech. “… we really think … Flossie…”

“No! Oh, no, not at all!” I stumbled over myself in my eagerness to reassure her, plopping down to sit on the floor by her feet. “Surely Flossie has neither lost her hair nor grown so ghastly. You do not represent her *really,* Tish, although you must pretend to *be* her.”

“But … you think … Caddie will believe?”

From behind me spoke the wise yet uncomplicated voice of Dr. Watson. “If Lord Cadogan retains any soul at all, he will see in you the spectre of his guilt.”

I told Tish, “You will be his worst nightmare come to life. He will feel such qualms as to obviate rational thought.”

And Sherlock said, “Confound everything, where is young Tewkesbury?”

Chapter the Eighteenth

Sunlight lanced through the cottage windows at a low and canted angle. Watson settled down at the table and ate. Sherlock paced. Tish sat like a rather freakish alabaster statuette.

“If Tewkesbury doesn’t arrive soon, we shall have to alter our plans!” Sherlock said loudly to no one in particular.

The sun began to set.

“If His Addlepated Lordship doesn’t arrive soon, we may not be able to proceed whatsoever!”

The sun sank below the distant hills, leaving behind only twilight the hue of old ivory.

Sherlock said, “We should never have trusted him.”

“Don’t blame Tewky!” I cried. “Something must have gone wrong!”

And then, just as I was ready to start wringing my hands like an old woman, I heard furious clip-clopping sounds approaching. Running outside, I took one look at the impending cloud of dust and wailed, “Oh, no!” understanding exactly what had gone wrong. I dashed forward and seized the yellow horse by her bridle, helping Tewky wrestle her to a halt; otherwise, she would have shot right on past the cottage, despite the fact that she had sweated herself into a lather. “You hired Jezebel!”

“Is *that* the confounded beast’s name?” Sagging on the driver’s seat of the wagonette as if he were utterly wrung out, Tewky gave me a look most expressive of the epithets he would like to have uttered regarding Jezebel.

“What happened?” demanded Sherlock, who now had hold of Jezzie by the other side of her bridle as she tossed her head, pranced, tucked her hind legs underneath her, and otherwise showed every sign of wanting to bolt.

“I requested a fast horse, and she’s fast, there’s no denying it. But I should also have asked for an accurate horse. Direction of travel makes no difference to her, nor does staying on the road.”

“Nor does discretion, evidently. She seems unlikely to fall in with our plan to wait in silence.” Sherlock gave the mare a glare that would have been droll were circumstances not so dire. “Well, at least you are here, Lord Tewkesbury, along with transportation of a sort, in regard to which we need to convene in a council of war.”

And so we did, once Jezzie was firmly tethered to a stout hitching post and pacified with a nosebag of oats. Tish, also, needed to be pacified a bit when told we all needed to talk, but after I draped a shawl over her head and assured her that Tewky was too preoccupied with food to look at her closely, she came out of the other room and joined the rest of us.

Sherlock took a professorial pose, arms folded, posterior propped against the table, one leg cocked rather like that of a flamingo. “Watson’s very sensible plan for Miss Glover to enter Dunhench Park stealthily, through a poacher’s hole in the back fence, is, alas, impractical now that darkness has fallen,” he said as if ruminating aloud. “One needs daylight to pick one’s way through rough woodlands. So we must enter by the front. But given the rambunctious proclivities of our horse, it now seems unlikely that any portion of our party can wait outside the gates without being noticed by the lodge-keeper.”

“Therefore we need to cosh the lodge-keeper,” Watson said.

“Which is risky and distasteful,” Sherlock said, and then he turned suddenly to Tish. “Miss Glover, you have not eaten all day, have you? Do you feel shaky?”

She nodded, but said in a barely audible voice, “It doesn’t matter.”

“You are quite right that it doesn’t matter once you have confronted our cad of an earl, but do you feel strong enough to walk across the lawn to Dunhench Hall? Or would it be better if we were to drop you off at the door?”

“Drop her off at the door?” I exclaimed.

“Yes. We can hide her in the wagonette. Watson can drive. Lord Tewkesbury is dressed well enough to represent exactly what he is, an upper-class visitor. There will be no necessity to cosh the lodge-keeper if he simply lets us in. As for the element of surprise … Enola, Miss Glover,

please think: in your experience of the place, is there any way for the lodge-keeper to forewarn Dunhench Hall of visitors?"

"Such as a telephone?" I joked.

"Such as sending a child running ahead with a message."

"Surely not at night," I objected.

"During the wedding," Tish said as if it pained her to think about her sister's wedding, "carriages simply drove in, and guests were announced at the door. But we don't want Caddie knowing how I got to his door, do we?"

"No. We want him to think you have run across country barefoot from only he knows where. Therefore, I have another question: could we drive towards Dunhench Hall across the grass, to muffle the sound of hooves and wheels?"

Tish and I exchanged questioning looks, then nodded. I answered, "The grounds in front of the hall are quite open."

"For complete stealth, could we manage without lanterns?"

I thought of the well-lighted portico. "Perhaps."

With an old soldier's fortitude and optimism, Watson said, "I think we should go find out."

★ ★ ★

Tish hid under a seat of the wagonette, on which I sat with my skirt spread protectively, regretting for the first time that dresses with fifteen yards of flounces had gone out of fashion. Sherlock sat beside me in a dark corner because of his rather seedy clothes, and Tewkesbury sat across from us, ready to deal aristocratically with the lodge-keeper. Watson, the driver, had given a bucket of water to Jezzie before we departed, and now was probably wishing he could retract such kindness.

"Whoa! I say whoa, there!" I had never heard Watson sound so ill-tempered as when he struggled to halt Jezzie at Dunhench Hall's wrought-iron gate. His angry voice brought the lodge-keeper out at once.

Viscount Tewkesbury, Marquess of Basilwether, stuck his top-hatted head out of the wagonette's window on his side. "A surprise visit to an old

friend, my good man," he drawled at the gatekeeper, his bored tone achieving the perfect acme of aristocratic condescension.

"Yes, my lord. Of course, my lord." The man opened the gate forthwith, and we rattled through. As soon as the gate closed behind us, Watson chided Jezzie again, "Whoa, there! Stay on the lane!" as he steered her onto the grass. "Confounded beast, what is the matter with you?" He actually did have a rather difficult time halting her in the deepest shadows between the gate and Dunhench Hall. Instantly, Sherlock and Tewky slipped out to extinguish the wagonette's lanterns, after which one of them, I think, walked at Jezzie's head to help Watson keep control of her as we rolled across the lawn in the dark. I cannot report exactly because I did not see. Still inside the wagonette, I was helping Tish get out from underneath the bench, careful not to knock any caked soap or beeswax off of her. I knew that we must be approaching the portico because the light through the wagonette windows increased sufficiently so that I could see her standing beside me, looking like a ghost.

She was going to need to be more durable than most ghosts. "Tish," I told her softly, "remember with your whole heart what our darling Caddie has done."

She nodded.

"And think what you would say to him if you were Flossie."

Nodding again, she lifted her head as the wagonette halted.

"And sink your dagger to the hilt."

She gave me just a flashing glance as she got out, helped by Sherlock; as I got out, helped by no one. Tewky was busy at Jezzie's head; he and Watson took the mare and wagonette away into the shadows at the side of the lawn. I ran to crouch between arbor vitae bushes next to the wall of Dunhench Hall, huddling beneath a lighted window I knew to be that of the dining room. Sherlock disappeared somewhere. And Tish, barefoot and bareheaded, ghastly and nearly indecent in her tattered dress, pattered up to the front door and knocked. Only then did I realize that the funeral wreaths were gone already, after a very brief length of time.

Tish knocked, stood waiting, then thought better of it and knocked again, loudly and at discourteous length, also pounding the door with her

other hand. The instant it finally opened, she dashed into the house, brushing past the butler, who uttered an exclamation most uncharacteristic of those who buttle. Indeed, what he said was too naughty to repeat.

At the same time, Tish yelled with force and ferocity far superior to any I had expected of her, “Caddie, you treacherous silver-plated blackguard, where are you!”

Reasoning that no one was likely to notice me, as all attention was on Tish, I scrooched upward against the wall, making a long neck to peek into the bottom corner of the window.

I saw, in profile, the Earl of Dunhench sitting at his end of the candlelit dining table with his after-dinner cigar motionless in front of his wide-open mouth. In the same moment, as the dining room door burst open and Tish lunged in, the cigar fell unheeded from his fingers—for, in the shadows, her shorn head looked almost like a bleached and bony skull that spoke.

“You! My Judas husband!” Tish shrieked, her shockingly naked white arms flailing upwards as she hurtled towards him. “How could you *do* this to me?”

Caddie upset his chair as he scrambled to get to his feet, albeit not as if a lady had just entered the room. “Brindle!” he shouted for the butler. “Summon help!”

Already lights were coming on, and there was a considerable hubbub of voices sounding from the corridors of Dunhench Hall, but Tish’s wild soprano cries trumped them all. “You married me!” she screamed. “You vowed to cherish me! Womanizing snake, how could you stoop so low as to send me off in a black barouche?” Running up one side of the long dining table, she rushed at Caddie as if she would lay hands on him.

Caddie dodged back behind the other side of the table, his manner most undignified in retreat, although his voice attempted a lordly tone. “Flossie, please, do calm down. Remember yourself.”

“*Remember* myself? The lady who used to have *hair*?” She laughed in a way that actually gave me a chill as she climbed onto a chair, then onto the table, sending china and crystal flying as she scuttled towards her “husband.”

“Brilliant!” whispered Sherlock’s voice near my ear. “What an actress she would have made!” He positioned himself at the corner of the window opposite mine.

Caddie gawked, his eyes dilated in horror and fixated on her filthy, unkempt feet as she swung them over the edge of the table towards him. He backed away from her in such disorder that he stumbled and nearly fell. “Brindle! Send for the carriage!” he yelled, fairly screaming.

“You disgust me! Like something stuck to the bottom of my shoe!” Tish shrilled. “When I used to have shoes!”

His Cadship turned tail and bolted out of the room. With a wordless shriek, Tish ran after him. I could no longer see her, but I could hear her yelling from the passageway, “No! Get your troglodyte hands off of me!” Evidently footmen were attempting to subdue her, for *troglodyte* would have been too kindly a designation for her to assign to Earl Cadogan.

“By all means, act like a madwoman, Flossie.” Caddie sounded angry and brutal now that he was not facing her alone. “You’re going back where you belong.”

“But where did she come from, Your Lordship?” asked Brindle’s sepulchral voice. “How did she get here?”

My heart froze as I thought that someone might be sent to question the lodge-keeper.

But Tish flared, “On my broom! In my magic slippers, can’t you all see them?”

And Caddie exploded, “Keep your filthy feet on the floor. Just get her out of here, Brindle!”

“You’re no man, let alone an earl. You’re a coward!” Tish cried.

“Muzzle her, somebody.”

There were sounds of a struggle. “The brute,” Sherlock muttered. “But she has every ability to deal with him. It’s time for me to be going.” One moment he was there talking, whether to me or to himself, and the next moment he had disappeared into the night.

Feeling not nearly as confident as he had sounded, I stayed where I was, worrying about Tish, unable to do anything to help her. Yet.

Chapter the Nineteenth

Time is a peculiar phenomenon, pretending to be regulated by clocks and watches, yet speeding or lagging just as it chooses. Those few moments of waiting and darkness before anything else happened were the most dilatory I had ever experienced. It seemed like ages before I heard sounds coming from the direction of the stable, eons before I saw Rudcliff's carriage come rolling up towards the hall. I felt as if I had grown a beard before it was time for me, like Sherlock, to be going.

The carriage, drawn by a sturdy pair of Cleveland Bays, rolled directly past me. I hid from the light of its lanterns, shrinking into the arbor vitae. But the instant its rear wheels spun by me, I darted out, dashed to its far side, and trotted along with it, hiding behind it and in its shadow as it pulled into the portico and halted at the hall door.

Crouching on my side of the carriage, I tried to listen, barely able to hear beyond the pounding of my own heart. For perhaps ten minutes now I had not been able to see or hear what was happening to Tish. I tried to tell myself that she had done wonderfully and would emerge undamaged. My heart wouldn't listen. She had been through rigours and would go through more. The black barouche awaited her.

I heard the door of Dunhench Hall opening. A babble ensued, including, to my relief, Tish's voice raised in undiminished fervor: "You're nothing but a pack of mongrels, the whole spineless lot of you!" And I heard scuffling sounds; she was struggling, as arranged, to divert attention from any sounds I might make.

Hoping the coachman's eyes and ears were all for the commotion surrounding Tish, I reached up to open the door on my side of the carriage as silently as I could, slipped inside, then shut the door just as stealthily behind me.

Jonah in the whale's belly could not have felt more in the dark than I did. I stretched my arms but felt nothing, and I needed to find a seat under which to hide! The voices all too quickly drew closer, among them a matronly one I had heard before. "Now dearie, do please settle down like the sweet darling Flossie I know you are. Dear lady, you'll always be my angel lamb, no matter what they done to your precious hair…" Dawson choked, and her voice trailed away. Mentally I blessed her, for her loquacity gained me time to feel my way to one of the lavishly upholstered carriage seats and crawl underneath it to hide in its shadow.

"Go away, you mealymouthed, simpering sheep! Let me alone!" retorted Tish. I heard more sounds of struggle, and then someone opened the carriage door. From where I lay in hiding I could see only feet, and it alarmed me that they wore sturdy brogues; none of them were bare. Where was Tish?

"Where is Caddie?" she flared, her voice directly above me; she perched on the seat under which I hid. "Is he too much of a coward to show me his face?"

"Now, now, my lady," said Dawson from the seat opposite. I heard what sounded like the scrape of a match, then saw a light blaze—or seem to blaze, however slight, in the darkness. It steadied; Dawson must have lit a candle. Odd, to bring a candle into a carriage, but perhaps she did not want a madwoman coming at her in the dark.

The carriage door shut and its wheels began to roll as I pondered two unexpected developments: Someone had put shoes on Tish, and Dawson was with us. Sooner or later, I would have to do something about Dawson.

But for the time being, as the carriage bore us away from Dunhench Hall, stopping only long enough for the lodge-keeper to open the gates, I stayed where I was, wishing there were some way of knowing whether Sherlock, Tewky, and Dr. Watson were following as planned. Of course the lodge-keeper would see them as their wagonette dashed out directly behind our carriage, and of course the lodge-keeper would run up to the hall and express suspicions that something peculiar was going on, but by the time that happened, if any alarum was raised, it need not concern us. Pursuit would be too late to overtake us.

I listened hard, but my ears told me little. Only the motion of the carriage informed me that we had passed the gate. Once on the high road, we swayed along at a rapid clip. Time had come for me to act, but I found myself in a bit of a quandary. While I felt no doubt that I was more than a match for Dawson, my initial position—crawling out from under a seat—would put me at a disadvantage. What if she were to scream, alerting the coachman? I most certainly did not want to deal with two adversaries at once.

Suddenly Dawson spoke; indeed, she blurted, as if driven by emotion. “Lady Dunhench, you must know that none of this at all is the least bit due to nothing you did. It’s the earl; he is the way he is, and it’s nobody’s fault __”

Tish reacted like a viper striking. Screeching something inarticulate, she coiled, snatched off her shoe, and flung it at Dawson’s face. Thereafter it is hard to describe with authority the exact sequence of events. Dawson gasped, ducking so clumsily that she nearly fell. Seizing my opportunity, I slithered out from under the carriage seat and saw her discomfiture. Tish yelled, “Cow!” and threw her other shoe at Dawson, who fell to the floor whilst ducking it—or perhaps in surprise at seeing me, or more probably because the carriage came to a crossroads and turned sharply—not for the first time.

Flat on the floor, with eyes both wild and wider than I would have thought possible considering her bovine qualities, Dawson opened her mouth to scream, but I pounced, clamping my hand over her mouth before she got past her initial squeak. Kneeling on her bosom, with one hand silencing her and the other flourishing my dagger, I warned her, “Don’t make a sound.”

Tish got up to retrieve her shoes, and her face was a study, but that was not what first caught my attention regarding her. At some point, I saw with surprise and relief, someone had put clothing on her, a dimity frock awkwardly tugged over the tattered dress she already wore, and sagging cotton stockings, and a shawl wrapped around her head and shoulders.

I asked, “Are you all right, Tish?”

As I remained physically atop Dawson, I felt her startle when she heard the name.

“I’m exhausted,” Tish said, sitting down in a way that vouched for the veracity of this statement.

“You were marvelous, you know. Brilliant.”

“Is it all going as planned?”

“There is no way of our knowing for sure, but I expect so.”

“Then I may get rid of these pistachio shells?”

“And beeswax and so forth? Certainly.”

With my hand still muffling her mouth, Dawson made a squeak conveying astonishment and inquiry. I turned to her and spoke most sincerely, gazing down into her eyes. “Dawson, what you are seeing is sisterly love such as you are never likely to experience again. Tish has shorn her hair, starved herself, worn a pauper’s dress, and undergone the utmost rigours for the sake of her twin, all in an attempt to trick the Earl of Dunhench into mistaking her for her sister. We mean no harm to you.” This while my dagger still hovered over her. “Our sole purpose is to find and free Lady Felicity. Dawson, I know you have a good heart.” Although not much backbone—but I kept that thought to myself. “If I sheathe my dagger, will you promise not to interfere?” I wanted to sound like an angel of justice with sword in hand, but I found myself wheedling.

Dawson nodded so vigorously she dislodged my hand. Standing up, I returned my dagger to its sheath in the busk of my corset, then helped her to her feet and saw her re-seated, keeping a strict watch on her the whole time lest she attempt some kind of subterfuge.

“Dawson,” I demanded, “*why*, pray tell, did your master see fit to rid himself of Lady Felicity in such a disgraceful and underhanded fashion?”

She stared at me, blinking and blank, before she answered. “Why, Miss Basilwether, it’s just his way. He can’t stand one woman for long. Her smilin’ and singin’ like a lark wore him out. The wonder is that he married her in the first place. I truly believe he thought he loved her.”

From across the carriage, Tish called Caddie an unrepeatable name. Unsurprised and without taking offense, Dawson turned her attention to

Tish, who had already peeled or rubbed most of the pseudo-ghastliness off of her skin.

"Miss Glover," said Dawson in awed and obsequious tones, "I never would have guessed it was you."

Tish replied only with a grimace. Vestiges of rage still clung about her like incorporeal rags.

But Dawson persevered. "How on earth did you know to come looking for your lady sister?"

"You truly expected me to be so stupid as to believe Flossie was dead?"

"Most people did," said Dawson humbly.

"Most people are not twins. Flossie could not have left this life without me, or I would have felt it." Her tone changed. "I feel it now, my sister's being. She is not far away!"

"That's true." Dawson looked more than ever impressed. "We should be getting close."

"Close to *where*?" I demanded.

Quite docile, Dawson responded, "The Lesser Smythnuncle Sanatorium for Imbeciles and Mental Defectives."

As I was attempting to memorize this cognomen (in case, by any mischance, it might be needed later), the carriage slowed to navigate a curving drive, then drew to a halt. We all stiffened as we heard the driver climb down from the box—I in particular, for I froze, unable to decide whether to draw my dagger to control Dawson or hide under the seat in case the driver opened the carriage door.

Fortunately, he did not. "Dawson," he bawled, "stay with 'er a bit until I knocks somebody up."

And to my most pleasant astonishment, Dawson called back, "All right."

The sound of his boots crunching on gravel proceeded away from us. As soon as I deemed it safe to do so, I opened the carriage door—the one opposite the direction the coachman had gone—and poked my head out.

Beyond the wan light of the carriage lamps I saw only darkness.

Trying not to let my heartbeat hasten in consternation—not quite yet—I got straight out of the carriage and walked back behind it.

Nothing.

I listened but heard no reassuring sound of clopping hooves.

We had reached the insane asylum, but I neither saw nor heard any sign of Watson or Tewky or Holmes or their wagonette or their thrice-accursed yellow horse.

Chapter the Twentieth

“Tish,” I said, opening the carriage door that faced away from the asylum, “the others are not here. They must have gotten lost. We must retreat.”

“I’ll do nothing of the kind!” It seemed as if Tish, in playing the part of her angry twin, had seriously taken on a shoe-throwing sort of personality. “I’m going in there. I’m going to see my sister.”

“But Tish, you can’t!” Trying to decide on a plan of action, I was reasoning backwards from the worst thing that could happen: Tish herself being committed as a lunatic. “They won’t let Flossie go on just your say-so!”

“They know Lady Felicity as Nora,” volunteered Dawson, observing us eagerly yet placidly, as if seated in a theatre. “Mrs. Nora Helmer.”

“She’s lost her *name*?” Tish sounded dazed.

“Nora Helmer!” I exclaimed. Evidently Caddie had been to see the latest controversial play, *A Doll’s House*, and had chosen a unique way to mock its heroine. “How fiendish! Tish, how can you possibly expect—”

Heatedly she cut me off. “I have not come this close to finding my sister in order to hesitate! You know where she is; go for help!”

“Afoot, in this isolated place, with no idea which way to turn?” If being committed was the worst that could happen to Tish, being stranded was the worst that could happen to me—yet I could hardly ride along in the carriage back to Dunhench Hall, could I? Nor could Tish, for that matter. Somehow I must keep both her and myself out of harm’s way. “Tish—”

“Hush!” she ordered, urgently gesturing for me to leave; she must have seen, as I did, the swaying light of a lantern moving towards us. I backed away, closing the carriage door as quietly as I could, but I knew I would not do what Tish wanted of me. I could not simply abandon her in the asylum.

Only one other option occurred to me, involving swift action and surprise. But luckily, the coachman had no reason to beware of me. Indeed, he had no idea I existed.

Reaching the carriage, he opened the door and spoke to Dawson. Edging around the back of the carriage towards him, I heard his bewildered voice. “They say Missus Nora Helmer ain’t run off at all. She’s right there in her ward where she belong.”

“That’s right.” Dawson sounded ever so smug. “This one here is her twin sister.”

Peeking out of my hiding place, I saw the man gawking like a fish. I also surveyed his surroundings and made a useful observation.

“So what am I supposed to do?” the coachman appealed.

“The earl wants her committed just the same,” said Dawson, to my scowling disapproval. Evidently Dawson was a weathervane of a woman, taking sides as the wind blew.

“But—but that’s awful serious, especially as she ain’t the right one.”

“What other choice do you have? Adopt her, you and your wife?”

Tish said impatiently, “Just call me Mrs. Linde and take me in there.” Tish had not yet ceased to surprise me; Mrs. Linde was the name of Nora Helmer’s friend and confidante in *A Doll’s House.*

The coachman coughed in the hesitating manner known as “hem and haw.” “Well…”

Tish put one foot on the step to get out of the carriage. He reached out a hand to assist her.

I charged. Gentle reader, please bear in mind that, while not weighty, I *am* tall and strong, and I lanced into them like a battering ram. In less time than it takes for me to tell it, I knocked them both sprawling, Tish back into the carriage on her posterior, and the coachman similarly into a formidable rosebush.

“Enola!” Tish cried, “I will never forgive you, never!”

That hurt enough to make me bite my lip as I shut the carriage door on her and darted onward, swarming up the carriage as if it were a tree, seizing the reins from where the coachman had secured them, grabbing the whip and lashing the horses. They sprang forward, and at the same time,

not at all coincidentally, I sat down hard on the coachman's bench. I kept the presence of mind to ply the reins so that the plunging horses stayed on the drive, the carriage slewed and swayed its way around the turning, and we sped back in the direction from which we had come. I heard the coachman swearing and snapping thorny branches as he struggled to get up from the rosebush, and to my satisfaction, his curses faded away, left behind.

I started tugging on the reins and addressing the horses in soothing tones, telling them they could cease galloping now. My lucky fates be praised that the Cleveland Bays, scions of a fine old breed, proved to be far more civilized than Jezebel. By the time we reached the end of the drive, I had slowed them to a trot, and I reined them in even more to accomplish the turn onto the road at a walk. Otherwise, I might have upset the carriage, especially as I could see only by the light of its lanterns. But I very much feared Tish might jump out when we slowed down. As soon as I could, I clicked my tongue and snapped the whip to send the horses once more into a smart trot.

We whirled along for a few miles, when our road ended at a thoroughfare. I had no idea which way to turn, but in this case she who hesitated might have had a mutiny on her hands; slowing the horses to a walk, I took a quick glance to the left—at darkness—then to the right, where I saw a hint of a light. Peering through trees, I thought it could have been sizable but quite distant, or closer but quite small. Indeed I had no idea what was its source, but it hardly mattered. Lost in the night, like a moth I turned towards the light, urging the horses into a trot again.

As we rounded a gentle curve in the highway, I saw it more clearly, not so far away from us; I saw it move—then felt a bolt of fear straighten my spine, for I now perceived the light to be a lantern held by a man blocking our road! A robber? I could not turn such a large, clumsy thing as a carriage to flee him, I saw no way past him, and the only other choice seemed to be to run over him.

"Halloo there!" he called, swinging the lantern.

At the sound of his voice, recognition took my breath away. I could not muster speech to answer him as I reined in the horses.

Not knowing who I was, he strode forward, lifting his lantern to have a look at me. Voice pitched about an octave above his normal tone, he exclaimed, “Enola?”

“Hello, Sherlock. What happened?” Foolish question, for, stopping the carriage, I could see what had happened. The wagonette swooned in the ditch beside the road with its wheels spinning awry while Tewky and Watson surveyed it forlornly. As for Jezebel, she was notable only by her absence and by the damage she had wrought.

“What happened?” Sherlock mimicked. “I should ask *you* what happened. Why are you driving this carriage when we both know you cannot drive?”

I had no chance to retort, for the carriage doors opened. Tish and Dawson stepped out, Dawson carrying her now nearly spent candle.

“Enola Holmes,” cried Tish, her words choked by wrath and tears, “I shall hate you forever unless we go back there and get my sister straightaway.”

“Well,” said Sherlock, “we can’t have her hating you forever, can we?”

★ ★ ★

A short time later, when we once more drove into The Lesser Smythnuncle Sanatorium for Imbeciles and Mental Defectives, our carriage lamps were not the only illumination. Several persons, both male and female, clustered out front holding lanterns, their interest centred upon a rampantly gesticulating individual.

“That’s the coachman,” I explained to Sherlock, who was riding up on the box with me, having helped me get the carriage turned around. “I had to shove him into the clutches of a big rosebush, or he would have taken Tish inside.”

I thought I heard Sherlock chuckle, but could not be sure, because the coachman came running towards us, shouting, “You! Thief! I’ll have the law on you! Robbery, assault and battery!”

“Poppycock. Do please calm down, my good man.” Alighting from the carriage with his usual energy and air of command, Sherlock offhandedly gave the coachman a folded note, specifically, a Bank of England note. Its

denomination I can only surmise, but it was sufficient to calm the coachman instantly. “And you, my good lad,” my brother addressed a stable boy who was prepared to mount a cob, presumably to go summon the local constabulary, “all will soon be settled. Put your nag away.” The youngster did so without question, and Sherlock turned to the others, who were staring not only at him but at me securing the reins and descending, shockingly and unmistakably female, from the box, and at the odd assortment of people emerging from the carriage: Watson with the black bag of a doctor, Tewky all dressed up like a dandy, Dawson stout and humble and enjoying herself, and Tish with various colours of greasepaint smeared all over her face from her efforts to remove it.

But all eyes turned to Sherlock when he spoke. “Who is the proprietor of this establishment?”

“I, sir, Roland Mizzlethorpe, M.D., most humbly at your service.” A peculiar sort of concave man stepped forward, long of face, hollow of chest, obsequious of manner. “And you are?”

“It does not matter. You will be dealing with Dr. Watson.”

The man’s eyes fairly bugged out, flashing white like those of a frightened horse, as he slewed them towards Watson. Evidently he recognized the name, I assumed from Watson’s fame as my brother’s chronicler. But I was mistaken.

Watson told him, “I am here on behalf of a patient you call Nora Helmer, although I am sure you know quite well that is not her real name. Her sister has intervened for her, and we wish her to be released immediately.”

Dawson, I noticed tangentially, had somehow obtained a wet handkerchief and was helping Tish scrub her face with it.

Mizzlethorpe visibly tottered between surrender and resistance for a moment, during which he delayed response by violently motioning his people to go back inside the sanatorium. Once the onlookers were gone, he stiffened. “On what grounds?”

“Come, come, my man, you know as well as I do that she does not belong here,” scoffed Watson.

But Sherlock had reached a more shrewd assessment of Mizzlethorpe. “We wish to see her commitment papers.”

“No!” Again the man spooked like a horse.

“Ah. They are irregular?” Then Sherlock remarked to Watson, “Old chap, I will bet you a dinner at Simpson’s that yours is the name signed to them. Lord Caddie seems to have got it off a list. He must not be much of a reader.”

Dr. Mizzlethorpe entreated, “Gentlemen, please! I am sure we all wish to prevent scandal of any sort.”

An imperious voice spoke. “Then I want my sister. *Now.*”

Tish stood, a lone, lance-straight figure in the shadowy light of lanterns, and all three men turned to stare at her as if a pilaster had spoken. Then they put their heads together and muttered. Off to one side, Tewky was conferring with the coachman as Dawson picked thorns out of him. With no one else near, I went to stand by Tish and take her hand. She welcomed me with a wan smile; evidently she had forgotten that she hated me and was never going to forgive me. The grip of her hand on mine tightened as the men began to move.

Sherlock, Watson, and the Pecksniffian asylum doctor walked off and went inside, but as the front door of the asylum closed behind them, Tish made no attempt to follow them. Perhaps she understood that she had done all she could, or perhaps she could not bear to see where her sister had been kept. Perhaps she felt weak—and no wonder, as she had not eaten all day. She did not speak; she stood like a pillar of the Parthenon, but I could feel her trembling.

We stood hand in hand for what seemed like a long time before, at last, the door opened again.

Tish gave a low, wordless cry, dropped my hand, and ran, or stumbled, into her sister’s arms. They hugged, they wept, and she, Tish, looked far more pitiful than Flossie did. Beautiful Flossie, her long hair untended but only a little bit unkempt, her lovely face, mirror image of her sister’s, pale but not thin, her dress dark and plain but whole. Embracing, the sisters gazed at each other’s faces, then each sobbed upon the other’s shoulder, then they gazed again. “Tish, your hair!” Flossie exclaimed.

“It’ll grow back,” said Tish with a smile—the warmest, widest smile I had ever seen on her, now that her troubles were over.

Coming out of the asylum directly after Flossie, my brother and Watson stood smiling as I dare say I was smiling myself, looking on. Flossie was telling Tish, “It was not so bad, only that I could not sleep at night for all the screaming going on, and I saw the most awful things, and I could not cease brooding over Caddie, his infidelities, how he had doomed me for not being complaisant, and how dare he summon the black barouche for me.”

I noticed Tewky had come over to speak with Sherlock, who nodded, then said to everyone in general, “The coachman has agreed to drive. Come, we must be going.”

Flossie flung up her head in alarum. “Where are you taking me?”

“To the Dorking train station,” Sherlock said.

“To live with me,” Tish told her.

“Oh, Tish! Truly?”

“Of course.”

“But—I’m frightened. Can we keep Caddie away from me?”

“Leave that to me and my brother,” I said.

Flossie turned her lovely, shadowed eyes on me, their question unspoken: Who are you?

“This is my cherished friend Enola Holmes,” said Tish with a fervor that warmed my heart.

“And my brother is Sherlock Holmes,” I told Flossie. “It is incumbent upon us to visit the Earl of Dunhench on your behalf. If, in his obstinacy, His Cadship should wish to reclaim you, we will threaten him with scandal. He has falsely represented you as deceased, so we can hold the fear of the law over his head. I feel quite hopeful that we can persuade him to provide you with a handsome monetary settlement—is that not so, Sherlock?”

“It might perhaps be possible,” he replied.

His tone was annoyingly that of a more cautious older brother, but I didn’t mind. I knew very well what I could do; indeed, what I quite

intended to do. “So you need not feel in any way apprehensive,” I assured Lady Felicity. “We will take care of everything.”

Epilogue

by Sherlock Holmes

Undeniably, “The Case of the Black Barouche,” as Enola insists on calling it, presented unique points of interest, and I would not have missed it for the world. But just as undeniable was my strong sentiment of relief when we got back to London and my fearless sister once again went her own feckless way. From the moment we rescued Lady Felicity until several weeks afterwards, Enola remained mostly preoccupied with fussing over Tish and Flossie, blessedly aiming her interfering proboscis in their direction rather than mine. She ordered quantities of flowers and baskets of food delivered to Tish’s lodging. She hired a maid of all work and a cook for them. She commissioned a seamstress to outfit Flossie in “necessaries.” She not only loaned Tish a wig but purchased a new, blond one for her. And the moment the Glover sisters felt strong enough, she began to take them shopping. And again shopping, almost every day. And more and further shopping: for frocks, suits, coats and cloaks, boots, slippers, parasols, reticules, gloves, and hats with all the trinkets and trimmings. I have no very clear idea what “furbelows” are, but I am quite sure the three of them obtained some. As I decidedly declined to exhibit any interest in their purchases, they invited Tewkesbury to London for a day to admire their new wardrobes. Thus was I left largely in peace, for I saw Enola only in regard to business.

This being the unpleasant business of obtaining funds for Lady Felicity from Lord Cadogan Burr Rudcliff II, Earl of Dunhench.

I took this matter upon myself, intending to keep my sister innocent of it. In her youthful, swashbuckling way, Enola was determined to blackmail Lord Cadogan Burr Rudcliff II to the utmost, but even though that Cad of all cads quite deserved punishment, I would not be a party to extortion. I had explained this to Enola, and she vehemently disagreed, but one can

hardly expect a woman, even a most intelligent one, to comprehend a gentleman's code of honour.

Therefore, I made sure to act promptly, before Enola might make mischief. Accompanied by my faithful Watson and his trusty service revolver, I traveled back to Dunhench Hall only a day and a half after we had quitted it, and there we arrived to find His Cadship having the howling fantods. Even as his mournful butler blocked our entry, I could hear the earl within, ranting, "Take them down and burn them, every one of them! Burn them, I say!"

Most interesting. I quite wanted to see what, exactly, was being cremated this time. Telling the butler, "We are here on the business of Her Majesty Queen Victoria!" I shoved past him with Watson by my side, and making our way towards the hubbub the misfortunate earl was creating, we found that amoral aristocrat in the parlour, stamping to death something on the carpet as if it were a deadly viper. However, I saw as we walked in, it was just a framed picture, a dainty watercolour of flowers. Rudcliff actually smashed the glass and splintered the frame before he seized the painting itself and cast it into the hearth fire.

"Ah," I said, comprehending. "You destroy the artwork of Lady Felicity when you can no longer destroy Lady Felicity herself."

Swinging around, his head menacing like that of a bull about to charge, he bellowed, "Who the hell might you be?"

"I might be, and am, Sherlock Holmes, retained on your wife's behalf."

He let out an oath that scattered the nearby servants—they dropped their sacrificial paintings as they ran. Watson kindly bolted the doors behind them, so that the ignoble nobleman and I might not be troubled by their return. Then my good Watson stationed himself at the main entry and stood guard with his pistol in hand.

"Might we sit down?" I asked Lord Cadogan politely. "We need to arrange for your continued financial support of your wife, in the form of a settlement you will pay her."

"The hell I will!"

"Oh, you will," I told him earnestly, "or else stand in the dock on charges of falsifying medical signatures on admittance papers."

The conversation rather deteriorated thereafter. Indeed, so threatening did he become that I pulled out my life preserver—a handy pocket truncheon made of rope and weighted wood—and showed it to him. Phlegmatically Watson remained at his post by the door; he knew, as I did, that most bullies are cowards. And sure enough, His Cadship quickly resorted to bluster.

"You can't prove it about the signatures!"

"He most certainly can," retorted my good Watson from across the room. "Or at least one of them. I am Dr. Watson."

The earl recoiled as if from a physical blow, eyes darting in search of escape. "Brindle!" he howled for his butler. "Bring footmen!"

I rather lost patience. "Sit down," I ordered Cadogan, directing him with uplifted truncheon towards a chair at the parlour table. "If you attempt to eject us, we will simply return with legal authorities. Do you want that?"

The earl did not answer, but he sat. Behind me, I heard a murmur of voices as Watson directed Brindle to fetch his master's stationery, pen, ink, blotting paper, et cetera.

I told Cadogan Burr Rudcliff II, "You will now write a complete confession. Start with the fate of your first wife, Myzella Haskell."

He balked, of course, and I had to prompt him each step of the way: he had falsified commitment papers, locked up his wife in a lunatic asylum, told her family she was dead, faked her cremation. He penned his account so bold and large that I could read it from where I stood. I had him continue to pen much the same shameful account of his treatment of Felicity Glover. Finally, I had him sign and date this document and turn it over to me. Watson then read it and witnessed it.

I seated myself at the parlour table opposite the glowering earl. "Now," I told him, "we need to arrange payment—"

"Blackmailer!" he exploded at me.

"I am a gentleman," I told him severely. "Never would I stoop to blackmail! And you have proved that you are not a gentleman whatsoever at all. Only for that reason do I require this surety." I patted the pocket wherein I held his confession. "If you *were* a gentleman, this would be

merely a gentleman's agreement, not extortion in any way. As it is, think what you like; nevertheless, you are to place into a bank account for your wife each month the same amount of money that you were paying to have her put away. No less, no more." I had inquired regarding the sum, which was quite enough for Flossie to support herself in a modest way; it was probably more than Tish made with her typewriter.

His Cadship brightened, reaching almost eagerly for pen and paper, as he had expected me to insist on far worse.

Behind me, a heightened female voice proclaimed, "Great parlous piles of pig dung!"

I stiffened. No, it couldn't be.

But, I saw plainly as I rose and turned, it was. Enola stood there, imperiously hatted and dressed in her city-of-London best. Next to her, just as formidably arrayed, stood an older woman I did not know. Behind them, near the door, I glimpsed Watson, sheep-faced, not looking at me.

And Enola glared straight past me, skewering the Earl of Dunhench with her stare. "Balderdash! *Poppycock!*" she expanded. "You cad!" She ordered Caddie, "Give Flossie at least three times that amount per month, or Dame Haskell and I will tell the whole world what you did to your wives. Not only Felicity, but also Myzella."

Much as I was taken aback by Enola's appearance on the scene, I retained sufficient presence of mind to pull my attention away from her, turn, and check on the earl lest he throw something. But I need not have concerned myself. All the fight seemed to have gone out of him. He sat like a great gawking gudgeon, fixated on the two females as if he saw an invading army. But his apprehension seemed focused mainly upon Dame Haskell, who had not said a word. Having given her my usual quick assessment, I saw only a short and rather shapeless old woman with quite a countrified face resembling a withered apple. Yet somehow, in their redoubtable hats, she and Enola seemed to loom like veritable Erinyes, Fates, Furies. Up until that moment I had regarded women's elaborate headgear as merely silly at best and ridiculous at worst. But in that shadowy moment at Dunhench Hall, I began to perceive it differently.

Dame Haskell tilted her head—and her imposing hat—just a threatening trifle towards the Earl of Dunhench and ordered, “Do it.”

Instantly he took up his pen, and within a few minutes, with surprising celerity, the necessary papers were signed and the first deposit of Felicity’s much-increased stipend turned over to me.

“Now,” I told him, “I require a written promise that you will make no attempt ever to contact, or interfere in any way with, your wife or her sister, Letitia Glover.”

“Now see here—” he began to bluster.

Enola silenced him. “Remember how Tish had you screaming and on the run in your own dining room?” she told him with unholy glee. “I would think you’d be glad to stay as far away as possible from both of the Glover sisters.”

He glowered and sulked, but he wrote the necessary document. With our business finally concluded—although no handshakes were exchanged—Watson and I saw ourselves out, each of us escorting one of the ladies.

Enola took my arm, but once the doors of Dunhench Hall had closed behind us, I had no idea what to say to her. Descending the steps, I remained silent, displeased by her being there, by her interference—I admit it. However, the first moving object that caught my eye drove all such thoughts from my mind. It was an all too familiar prancing yellow horse hitched to Dame Haskell’s awaiting brougham.

“Please tell me that is not Jezebel!” I exclaimed.

“It’s not. It’s Jezebel’s twin sister, Jasmine.” Parting from me with a grin I could not begin to decipher, Enola rode away with Dame Haskell, their mild-mannered mare trotting sweetly and sedately out of sight.

Watson stood by my side. “Definitely not Jezebel,” he remarked. “It is the merest coincidence, surely, that two mares should look so much alike.” He gave me his most guileless smile, and although I lifted my eyebrows in return, I no longer felt any inclination to reproach him for letting Enola into Dunhench Hall; I knew quite well how persuasive she could be when she wanted her own way.

“Indeed. I find myself quite weary of anything having to do with twins,” I remarked. “Let us go, shall we?”

Once back to London, I took him out to dine, and we drank a toast to a job well done.

Flossie very sensibly used some of her funds to buy tinware and japan it—that is to say, paint flowers and such on it with lacquer, decoratively coating the metal so that it would not corrode—and with her artistic flair she rendered her wares markedly superior to most. Eventually she took a stall in Covent Garden where she sells the tins and trays and candle shades and so forth at a goodly profit, with great success, as I am frequently reminded by Enola, who at least once a week purchases from her a very pretty flowerpot, match holder, or equally useless item, then brings it to my flat and, if she finds me at home, gives it to me. Indeed, on one pretext or another, my sister finds her way often to my flat, where she is quite welcome. However, she has not yet managed to involve herself in another case of mine. Nor do I intend that she should—although, undoubtedly, somehow she will.

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NANCY SPRINGER is the author of the nationally bestselling Enola Holmes novels as well as more than fifty other books for children and adults. She has won many awards, including two Edgar Awards, and has been published in numerous countries. She lives in Florida. You can sign up for email updates here.

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Contents

Title Page
Copyright Notice
Dedication

Prologue
Chapter the First
Chapter the Second
Chapter the Third
Chapter the Fourth
Chapter the Fifth
Chapter the Sixth
Chapter the Seventh
Chapter the Eighth
Chapter the Ninth
Chapter the Tenth
Chapter the Eleventh
Chapter the Twelfth
Chapter the Thirteenth
Chapter the Fourteenth
Chapter the Fifteenth
Chapter the Sixteenth
Chapter the Seventeenth
Chapter the Eighteenth

Chapter the Nineteenth
Chapter the Twentieth
Epilogue

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About the Author
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